

**THE UNIVERSITY OF WINCHESTER**  
**Faculty of Business, Law and Sport**

**Bisexual Christians & Mental Health:  
Why the Church needs to be more welcoming**

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## Abstract

In 1978, Fritz Klein, author of *The Bisexual Option*, noted: 'Bisexuals are sociologically non-existent, invisible in church, society and science (F Klein, 1978).' My aim in this research project was to examine whether bisexual people were still invisible within church communities, specifically within the Christian church in the UK and USA, and how this impacted on their wellbeing. This was with a view to addressing my central research question: is it possible to be bisexual and Christian and live holistically?

I was keen to see whether bisexuality was invisible in real terms in the period 2014-2017, the time-frame for this research. To this end, I interviewed a total of 83 participants, divided up into four research cells: Bisexual Christians in the UK, Bisexual Christians in the USA, Pastors and Supporters of Bisexual Christians in the UK and Pastors and Supporters of Bisexual Christians in the USA.

Interviews with pastors and leaders of LGBT faith organisations revealed a distinct lack of bisexual awareness, expressed through a dearth of bisexual pastoral resources and an almost total silence on bisexual issues in the public sphere. This was the case in both the UK and USA. Bisexual Christians themselves, meanwhile, reported an almost blanket silence on bisexuality within church environments and the Christian conference circuit, including, significantly, at LGBT-affirming services and events. These interviews confirmed the existence of bisexual erasure as a sociological phenomenon, flagged by academics and demonstrated by theologians at literature review stage. Yet, whilst erasure and stigmatisation were unambiguously reflected by bisexual Christians within this study, it was not possible to say with any degree of certainty that these stressors were solely behind the huge rates of depression and suicide ideation expressed by bisexual participants (89% UK and 100% US). Other factors, such as family break-up, childhood bullying, Seasonal Affective Disorder and autistic spectrum disorders were all reported as causational factors in poor mental health.

Interviews with both pastors and congregants alike revealed that bisexual Christians thrived best within fully inclusive faith communities, where middle sexualities and non-monogamy were accepted without prejudice and certain ethical boundaries surrounding honesty and mutuality observed. Such congregations appeared to be far more prevalent in the USA than in the UK, though intolerance of LGBT Christians was significantly higher, too, than in the UK. Whilst the US church culture was far more polarised than that of the UK, both countries revealed a disparate bisexual community, suggesting that bisexual Christians perhaps needed to network and mobilise themselves at national level and beyond, in the same way that trans Christians have done in reaction to the recent spate of bathroom bills.

To summarise, this research confirmed that bisexual Christians still appeared to be 'sociologically non-existent' (Klein, 1978) within church environments and church resources in the UK and USA, despite progress in acceptance of lesbian and gay Christians (and to a lesser extent, transgender Christians) within these same communities.



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## INTRODUCTION

### **My Story: Christian, Married, Bisexual**

My name is Carol Shepherd. I am a research student at the University of Winchester, UK. I am also a cisgendered mother of three who self-identifies as Christian and bisexual. At the time of writing this introduction, I am married to a cisgendered male and have been for twenty years.

Since the age of seven or eight, around the time I first started getting interested in popular music and television, I began to subconsciously note that I found both male and female identified people attractive - some more than others, as one might expect. Also around this time, possibly influenced by the Bible stories and parables recounted in assembly with enthusiasm by my primary school headmaster, I began to develop a spiritual awareness. I had a sense of a presence above me and around me, which I learnt to call God and Jesus respectively. I had been brought up in a non-church attending family and this burgeoning faith was discouraged both inside and outside of the home. So church was not an option until I was old enough to make my own way to a large Pentecostal church in the city where I lived. It was during these early explorations of church life that I learnt to keep quiet about my same-sex attractions - they were not welcome in the House of God.

My struggle to reconcile my spirituality and sexuality saw me read every book available to me on the subject of 'Spiritual Wholeness.' All the teaching I had ever received in the various conservative evangelical churches I had attended thus far had led me to believe that homosexual feelings to any degree were not of God and should be repented of. To act on these feelings was unambiguously sinful and one should turn away from this lifestyle or face eternal damnation along with murderers, adulterers, slanderers and those who covet their neighbour's ass.

Terrified of the fate that surely befell me, I presented myself for healing prayer and spoke to numerous pastors and youth leaders about the same-sex attracted side of me. I did not have the financial wherewithal to sign up for aversion therapy of any kind, so reading 'Christian' self-help books of this genre was a cheap alternative. The key works of 'homosexual healing' in the late 80s/early 90s were Leanne Payne (1995), Andrew Comiskey (1989), Mary Pytches (1991)

and Briar Whitehead (2003). The titles of these books – full of references to healing and brokenness - reflect the *zeitgeist* of that era, shaped by the fallout from Section 28<sup>1</sup>, the HIV/AIDS crisis and the ill-fated Lambeth Conference in 1988, which saw scuffles break out when Bishop Emmanuel Chukwuma of Nigeria attempt to exorcise demons of homosexuality from the Reverend Richard Kirker, erstwhile President of the Lesbian & Gay Christian Movement.<sup>2</sup>

On several occasions, members of ‘prayer ministry teams’ at Christian conferences also laid hands on me to ‘heal’ me of my homosexuality or attempted to exorcise the ‘devil of homosexuality’ out of me, much like the character played by Charlotte Coleman in the BBC adaptation of Jeanette Winterson's *Oranges are not the Only Fruit*.<sup>3</sup> This was all to no avail. I remained sexually and emotionally attracted to both men and women - and spiritually drawn to Jesus Christ.

This was a psychosexual conundrum that was to define my life, and continues to do so until this day. Like many other people I have met, I need to be emotionally and/or sexually intimate with both men and women, if I am to feel psychologically whole. However, unlike most of these people, including the vast majority of academics at my own place of study, such as my own Director of Studies, Professor Eric Anderson, I am also fascinated by the historical and spiritual figure of Jesus Christ. I retain my faith in a loving creator God who sent his perfect Son to set us free; yet I need the love of the created and fallen to feel truly liberated.

Church dominated a quarter of a century of my life, until it became apparent that one could not live with any degree of authenticity between the binaries and find a place within the mainstream Christian faith community. Church made me profoundly depressed. There is no liturgical framework, no theology, no Christian ethic on how to live holistically as a bisexual or bi-intimate follower of Jesus Christ, whether sexually active or not. (For some examples of works of gay theology/sexual ethics with little or no reference to bisexuality, see Boswell 1980;

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<sup>1</sup> See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Section\\_28](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Section_28): ‘Section 28 of the [Local Government Act 1988](#) caused the addition of Section 2A to the [Local Government Act 1986](#), which affected [England](#), [Wales](#) and [Scotland](#). The amendment was enacted on 24 May 1988, and stated that a [local authority](#) ‘shall not intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality’ or ‘promote the teaching in any [maintained school](#) of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship.’

<sup>2</sup> See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lambeth\\_Conferences](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lambeth_Conferences)

<sup>3</sup> Broadcast on BBC2, January 10-24 1990

Comstock 1993; Helminiak 1994; Farley 2006; Rogers 2009; Sharpe 2011; Barton 2012). Meyer's concept of Minority Stress Theory (Meyer 2003) discusses the damaging effects of stigmatisation on sexual minorities. I would argue that such stress is amplified within church communities, where moral purity carries extra currency and the pressure to conform to heteronormative monogamous relationships within marriage is all the greater.

My aim in this research is to find a Christian framework which potentially offers bisexual people of faith specifically to live with honesty and integrity, either inside or outside of the Church. An ambitious goal, some would say; others might say foolhardy (e.g. Gagnon 2002; Dallas 2007; DeYoung 2015). But that is the story and the motivation behind this project. Essentially, I am posing the question: is it possible to be bisexual and Christian and live holistically? And this, indeed, is my central research question

### **Intersectional Identities: The Bisexual Christian Problematic**

In his pioneering 1978 study of bisexuality, US sexologist Fritz Klein described bisexuals as 'sociologically non-existent,' invisible in church, society and science (1978: 17). Nearly forty years later, it seems bisexuals are still invisible in the church and theological literature, at least in the UK, despite progress made elsewhere (e.g. Kolodny 2000).

Whilst bisexuality has gradually acquired its place in the ever diverse list of sexual minorities, helped by the efforts of Klein, it remains the case that the B in LGBT is largely silent. Bisexuality remains largely unacknowledged, unexplored and misunderstood within faith circles. One of the most comprehensive accounts ever published about the lives of bisexual men, for example, does not look at how bisexuals operate within organised religions (Anderson & McCormack 2016). Bisexuals are rarely mentioned and precious little pastoral support, if any, is afforded them. Indeed, it seems that the majority of highly educated and (arguably) philanthropic clergy seem both unable and unwilling to get their heads around bisexuality. When the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, speaks of the divisions in the Anglican Communion, these are over 'homosexuality' and 'gay marriage' but no reference is made to bisexuality (e.g. press conference of 11 January 2016 prefacing the run up to the Primates Meeting at Canterbury<sup>4</sup>).

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<sup>4</sup> See <http://www.christianpost.com/news/anglican-leader-justin-welby-church-split-over-homosexuality-not-disaster-154631/>

This cultural erasure adds to, and may indeed be at the root of, the anxiety and pain felt by many bisexual people of faith.

This silence is a damaging combination of many factors. The role of binary thought as the operating system of patriarchal hierarchies, both in society and within the realms of gender politics and religion, has had an enormous effect on the acknowledgement and visibility of bisexual people, as has the pathologisation of non-heteronormative orientations from the mid nineteenth century to relatively recent times (e.g. Freud 1991; Payne 1995; Comiskey 2001; von Krafft-Ebing 2013). Towards the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, bisexuals were made scapegoats for the HIV/AIDS epidemic, whilst the current clamour for gay equality in all walks of life, including marriage, has further marginalized the specific issues associated with dual plus attracted individuals. The effects of such marginalization and ostracism can be seen in the lack of vigorous debate on life issues affecting bisexual people, beyond sexual health and titillating news magazine stories with titles such as 'Rise of the flexi-sexual female.'<sup>5</sup> This is worrying, when medical reports are increasingly reporting elevated levels of suicide among bisexual people.<sup>6</sup> How do we account for such silence?

Is it simply that bisexuals are not coming forward to tell their stories, as Pew suggests (2013)? Or is it that hierarchical systems and identity politics require the existence of simplistic dichotomies (male/female, straight/gay, good/evil) to maintain power bases, effectively gagging bisexual 'insurgents'? (Thatcher speaks of the 'over-used and over-tidy categories of heterosexual and homosexual', 1993:155) And is there a connection between the two? How do gender and race further impact on the willingness of bisexual people to 'come out' - especially within a faith context? And how do understandings of gender and biological sex in the light of queer theory (e.g. Butler 2004) further impact bi-tangibility<sup>7</sup> through deconstructing the very foundations of what we mean by sex, gender and sexual identity?

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<sup>5</sup> Rise of the flexi-sexual female: Women are 'more likely to be bisexual than men' - and change their minds about their sexuality. Read more: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-3209182/Women-likely-bisexual-men-change-minds.html#ixzz3yGnozmpE>

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, 'Bisexuals endure worst mental health problems and suffer from equality gap, report finds' at <http://www3.open.ac.uk/media/fullstory.aspx?id=22987>

<sup>7</sup> My own descriptor for the ability to take bisexuality seriously as a psychosexual identity and mode of existence



To be bisexual is inadvertently to be political, whether one lays public claim to the identity or not (Eisner 2013). This is because bisexuality challenges what Anderson and McCormack call 'monosexist' structures relating to gender, sexuality and morality (2016). The politics of bisexuality are more seriously heightened within the Christian Church, where traditional monogamous marriage between a man and a woman is still generally accepted as the Creator's exclusive will for human sexual expression (Church of England 1991). But while monogamous same sex marriage is making some inroads into the sexual hegemony, there remains a clear dialogical gap in the ongoing debate on how best to encompass other sexual minorities within the Church and its administrative and social structures.<sup>8</sup> What of those who do not fit very easily into the monosexual partner for life paradigm?<sup>9</sup> In particular, it seems that nobody wants to talk about bisexuality - it is simply too complicated to countenance. What chance then, in such a climate, of a holistic or embodied identity for bisexual people of faith?

### **Conceptual issues surrounding bisexuality as they impact on bi-visibility**

But before we even begin to consider dual attraction, we become submerged within a conceptual quagmire surrounding the bisexual condition. Halperin (2008: 453) speaks of no fewer than thirteen potential definitions of bisexuality, from those who have never had sexual relations with the same sex, yet identify emotionally as bisexual, to those who have sex with both genders, yet identify as heterosexual. And this is before we factor in transgender and intersex couplings. Others claim there are significantly more identities and behaviours that could count as bisexual (Rullo 2010, cited in Rullo, Strassberg and Miner 2015, lists thirty-four).

As society becomes more accepting of non-heteronormative sexual expression, the very word bisexual is deemed limiting and passé, with gender fluid, pansexual, omnisexual and the catch-all 'gender queer' deemed more appropriate to describe romantic or sexual attraction to all genders and gender identities. Such fragmentation of sexual identities, however, does not offer much in the way of a cohesive group identity for cissexual individuals who find themselves

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<sup>8</sup> See Church of England report on the Same Sex Marriage Bill 2013 at <https://www.churchofengland.org/our-views/marriage,-family-and-sexuality-issues/same-sex-marriage.as>

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, the Marriage Service liturgy at <https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-worship/worship/texts/pastoral/marriage/marriage.as>

attracted to both male and female identified people, and who long for understanding, acceptance and community in the very place which purports to champion it – the church.

Whether a sexual identity requires sexual expression to validate it, is another subject for debate. The Oxford Dictionary defines a bisexual as '*a person who is sexually attracted to both men and women*' with or without sexual activity. This view is shared by the Religious Institute in the USA, which defines bisexuality as '*an enduring romantic, emotional and/or sexual attraction towards people of more than one sex or gender*' (Alford-Harkey & Haffner 2014: 2). At a conceptual level, therefore, sexual orientation need not involve genital sexual expression.

Same-sex dalliance and sexual experimentation, argues Stephen Lingwood, does not constitute a bisexual identity. Bisexual identity is an embodied and long-term sense of attraction to both genders, where to label oneself either gay or straight would seem disingenuous.

I identify as bisexual because identifying as either gay or straight would feel dishonest; it would be denying part of myself that I judge to be significant, and would feel like being in the closet. If a person identifies as bisexual it means that his or her homosexuality and heterosexuality are significant enough for that person to consider himself or herself bisexual. A bisexual person does not need to act on those sexual feelings for both sexes to be happy (or to be bisexual). (2010: 33)

Yet for others, bisexuality is simply too abstract to be of practical use. Feminist liberation theologian Carter Heyward, whilst acknowledging bisexual aspects to her own sexual make-up, publicly eschewed bisexuality as a political identity in favour of the conceptual clarity of lesbianism:

I have been aware that there is a box, another box, a less constrictive box, for people with this experience: bisexual. As boxes go, bisexuality is not bad. It may be (if unknowable truths were known) the most nearly adequate box for *all* persons. The problem with bisexuality in my life (and I can speak only for myself) is that it has been grounded too much in my utopian fantasy of the way things ought to be and too little in the more modest recognition of myself as a participant in *this* society at *this* time in *this* world, in which I have both a concrete desire for personal intimacy with someone else and a responsibility to participate in, and witness to, the destruction of unjust social structures – specifically, the heterosexual box. (1984: 80)

Heyward continues:

It has been my experience that to live now as bisexual is to live somewhat abstractly in anticipation of a future that has not arrived. That is why, for several years, I have been coming out of bisexuality, coming out of utopian vision in order to focus my sight on the urgency and immediacy of the concrete present. (1984: 80)

While this decision must be taken in the context of the gay rights struggles of the 1970s and 80s, it did not help the bisexual cause. In a robust riposte to Heyward, Lingwood asserts:

...bisexuality is about concrete desire for personal intimacy; it is a name given to the concrete realities of people's lives: their relationships, sexualities, thoughts and feelings. There is nothing abstract about this. And there is nothing utopian about bisexuals demanding freedom from oppression in the here and now. Why should bisexuals wait until some eschatological future to live out the truth of their lives? (2010:37)

The emerging Queer movement of the late 1980s/1990s (Jagose 1997) made great strides in deconstructing the patriarchal systems that had suppressed women and sexual minorities for so long, by challenging essentialist positions on sex and gender. Yet whilst the Queer Movement succeeded in challenging binary thought and male hegemony (Butler 2004; Kosofsky-Sedgwick 2008), the 'queer' rainbow alliance of sexual minorities did little to promote the fledgling bisexual identity emerging from the work of Klein and others in the late '70s. As April Callis notes:

The seminal works of this theoretical school, written by authors such as Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, Diana Fuss and Eve Sedgwick, all bypassed bisexuality as a topic of inquiry even while writing against binary, biological models of gender and sexuality. (2009:213)

Callis continues:

... queer theory has ignored, and continues to ignore, questions of bisexuality and bisexual identity. It seems a curious gap, keeping in mind the aim of most queer theorists: the destabilisation of gender and sexual binaries. Bisexuality, which cannot help but be placed uniquely inside/outside of the binary of heterosexuality/homosexuality, seems to be an ideal starting place for deconstruction. (2009:219)

It is my own view that Foucault, in his unmasking of socially constructed power-based identities, did indeed write much of relevance to the bisexual question, even if it is not explicitly communicated as bi-affirming philosophy. However, it is arguably true that in the deconstruction process, queer theory contributed little towards achieving a political identity for bisexual people – though, admittedly, this was never a bespoke aim of the movement. Indeed, one of the underlying principles of Queer philosophy is auto-ethnographic; no-one should aim to speak on behalf of other minorities. It is up to the particular group to find its voice, for it to be deemed authentic (Butler 2004).

Queer theology, which emerged from the Queer Movement, suffered from the same (indirect) bi-myopic tendencies. In a paper tellingly titled *Reinforcing Binaries, Downgrading Passions: Bisexual Invisibility in Mainstream Queer Christian Theology*, Bernhardt-House describes many works of queer theology as ‘inherently biased’ against bisexuals (2010: 55). Such bias reveals the dilemma faced by queer theologians. Do they remain loyal to the social constructionist discourses of their poststructuralist forebears, or adopt a more essentialist view of human sexuality, which is a far better fit for the dualistic moral absolutes of the Christian faith<sup>10</sup> in terms of arguing the case for LGBT inclusion? If the latter is the case, then this is good news for monosexual identities, but less so for sexually fluid ones.

The paradox at the heart of the queer identity is reflected in the title of the 2013 publication, *Queering Christianity: Finding a Place at the Table for LGBTQI Christians* (Shore-Goss et al. 2013). ‘Queer’ cannot involve the ‘erasing or deconstruction of boundaries’ (Cheng 2011: 8) and at the same time serve as a collective term for the (fixed) subsets L,G,B,T,Q and I (2011: 9). In many works of Queer Theology (Stuart et al. 1997; Wilson 2000; Cheng 2011; Shore-Goss et al 2013), the terms gay, lesbian and transgender are all common-place within the text, yet bisexuality rarely occurs. For example, the Moderator of the Metropolitan Community Churches, Reverend Nancy Wilson, speaks of a ‘queer millennial vision’ where ‘gay men and lesbian in all churches will be welcomed with outstretched arms’ (2000: 156). This is a vision that allows lesbians and gay men to stand both under and outside of the queer umbrella, while bisexual people must remain underneath it, their identity subsumed within the catch-all queer and thereby erased. In this way, the queer moniker would appear to be utilised in a rather haphazard or arbitrary fashion, while the gay/lesbian essentialist discourses of 20<sup>th</sup> century Gay and Lesbian Studies (e.g. Abelow et al. 1993, 2012) retain their monopoly.

What lies behind this desire to retain an essentialist monosexist discourse? Is it simply habit or is it agenda-driven? One explanation for this is that the retention of ‘gay’ and ‘lesbian’ alongside ‘queer’ enables a gay-affirming case to be made for homosexuality in Scripture. It can be effectively argued that the Apostle Paul does not castigate homosexuals in his pastoral letters to the churches in Rome and Corinth in the New Testament, if we believe homosexuality

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<sup>10</sup> A good example of dualistic thinking can be found in Matthew 6:24: ‘No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.’

is fixed and therefore natural for that person.<sup>11</sup> Rather, according to this line of argument, Paul is drawing attention to those who act against their natural sexual nature, i.e. sexuality tourists, seeking sexual pleasure by engaging in physical acts outside of their usual sphere of contact. He is not pulling up those who are in committed homosexual relationships, or performing in line with their natural sexual instinct, but those who are transgressing the boundaries of their own innate sexuality.

Social constructionism and sexual fluidity are far more threatening approaches to the conundrum of human sexuality, for both majority and minority stake-holders in sexual politics, as relativism and queer sexualities cannot be contained within the prison walls of doctrinal absolutes or innate orientations. If theories of innate sexuality are surrendered to social constructionist arguments, which dictate that sexuality and gender are fluid and forever subject to prevailing cultural norms and power structures, then it is hard to argue a case for a progressive theology for LGBT Christians. There is no 'natural' state of affairs, no sense of moral order, only a state of flux and fluidity which can be manipulated by those in positions of power to the detriment of the sexually weak and disenfranchised – whoever those people may be at any given point in time. It is no small wonder then that the Church has failed to address the bisexual conundrum, when affirming theologians themselves are unwilling to tackle dual plus attraction within their same-sex affirming agendas, for fear of diluting arguments in favour of an essentialist position.

Speaking as a queer theologian, Lingwood (2010:33) asserts that more 'us' theology is required (bisexual theology written by bisexual people) rather than 'them' theology (theology written about bisexual people by both straight and gay theologians). The view of the insider is sacred, given the widespread ignorance of the issues faced by bisexuals - not only amongst clergy, but amongst psychotherapists, educators, even gay-affirming theological scholars and intellectuals. It is this desire to present the voice of the insider that has led me away from a purely

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<sup>11</sup> The passage referred to here is 'chief' clobber passage, Romans 1:24-27: 'Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the degrading of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error.'

theological approach and towards an applied theological social scientific approach to the bisexuality/faith intersection.

As Anderson and McCormack note in their own approach to qualitative research on bisexuality, it is important to work from the outside in and not the reverse (2016). My concern here is not what makes a person bisexual - if, indeed, it is possible to discern this - but how bisexual people manage life as a dual-attracted Christian, either inside or outside of faith communities, the decisions they make and the impact of prevailing cultures on these choices. Lived experience is key in the formulation of a sexual ethic, though accorded less credence the further right the denominational direction of travel. This is significant as we compare the fundamentalist ideological position on sexuality with a progressive theology that allows for individual diversity. According to a conservative Christian ethic (e.g. Gagnon 2002), the bar for a believer not called to celibacy is permanently set at heterosexual monogamous marriage, irrespective of whether that feels achievable or not. Personal realities or lived experience do not come into the equation. Within a more progressive theology (e.g. Heyward 1989), the moral compass points to justice and mutuality in relationships, irrespective of the gender or sexuality of one's life partner(s).

### **Bisexual Activity: The Great Unmentionable**

If bisexuals are the phantom subjects of LGBT theory and pastoral practice, their very existence called into question, then sexual activity is the elephant in the room, the great unmentionable. It is debatable whether it is either helpful or authentic to postulate a theory for bisexual inclusion without at least making some attempt to cover the issue of duogamy<sup>12</sup> or polyamory – or, to be blunt, what one is supposed to do with a set of feelings, the expression of which is not always compatible with emotional and/or sexual fidelity. In seeking to avoid stereotyping bisexuals as sexually voracious philanderers, it seems that the gritty realities of what one does about physical/emotional longing have been deemed too sensitive for faith based inclusivity studies. Yet if online chat forums are anything to go by, this is a burning issue for many bisexual people of faith.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> According to the Urban Dictionary, the word duogamy 'Refers to a bisexual individual having two exclusive sexual partners, one of each gender.'

<sup>13</sup> e.g. at <http://whosoever.org/seeds/bisex.html>

However, from existing research material, it seems that few are interested in discussing sexual activity in LGBT-affirming faith literature. The Religious Institute, based in Westport, Connecticut, recently published a ninety-five page bi-friendly pastoral resource for churches, with no reference to sexual practice beyond a coy admonishment of congregants who ask personal questions of their bisexual pastors (2014:64). (Though I understand from a personal conversation with a pastor involved in its publication that even this was deemed daring within the prevailing environment; therefore this omission should be seen within the context of a restrictive discursive forum).

In this way, the bisexual person of faith may suffer holistic or embodied frustration, affecting the mind and body alike. So alongside considerations of how to be bisexual within a Christian ethical framework, we need to be asking how we 'do' bisexuality. It is one thing for Christian theologians to call for the release of Eros (Farley 2006:178), quite another to release Eros in a manner congruent with (broadly accepted) Christian ideals of monogamy and emotional fidelity. It seems that a great deal of LGBT affirming theology is afflicted by the self-same head/body dualism that it seeks to oppose, offering much in the way of theoretical inclusivity, yet offering precious little in the way of practical guidelines on how to live as an embodied individual within that ethical framework.

### **Traditional Christian Sexual Ethics**

Christian Sexual Ethics typically build their foundations on the so-called Methodist or Wesleyan Quadrilateral, the four pillars of theology, tradition, secular knowledge and contemporary experience (Farley 2006; Cheng 2011). This project takes in the views of theologians, historians and social scientists, as well as the lived experience of bisexual people of faith and those who pastor them. I empirically investigate the lived experiences of bisexual Christians today. I do this through discussions with pastoral organizations and individuals engaged in bi-affirming ministry.

Based on these four pillars, I formulate a Christian ethic for the bisexual person of faith that delivers on the wellness front. I cover these four areas using the following:

- *Tradition*: a survey of how heteronormativity and monogamy entered Christian theocracies and church life from Constantine to present day and how this has led to a

conspiracy of silence on bisexual issues both within mainstream dominations and the LGBT faith community in the Western Christian Church.

- *Scripture*: A summary of the seven 'clobber passages' on homosexuality in the Bible and expressions of same sex love and bisexuality within the sacred texts. This will also include a discussion of how theologians past and present have interpreted these texts to the detriment of/benefit of bisexual people of faith.
- *Human Reason*: The work of sexologists and poststructuralists in deconstructing normative statements regarding human sexuality, as these impact on our understanding of Scripture. This includes the work of Victorian sexologists, post-war sexologists, feminists and queer theorists.
- *Contemporary Experience*: The lived reality of bisexual people of faith based on researcher-led interviews with organisations that support (or work against) bisexual people of faith, and the individuals on the receiving end of such pastoral support. Recent academic and sociological reports may also be taken into consideration here, where these shed additional light on the issues at hand.

Current attitudes within the Christian Church (Western and otherwise) towards non-heteronormative identities are considered, specifically as they impact on bisexual people. The treatment of bisexuality within the LGBT faith community is also covered. Silence as symptomatic of a general malaise within society/Christian communities with non-binary thought and experience will be discussed, as this relates to hierarchical power structures (Heyward 1999; Robinson 2008). The effect of this malaise on forging a positive identity for bisexual people of faith is assessed, including the specific circumstances of bisexual men and women.

Secular models for bisexual relationships and alternative Christian models are considered to see how they measure up to Judeo-Christian marriage/relationship ideals. In so doing, I question traditional interpretations of biblical ethics and patriarchal power structures based on the findings of progressive theologians such as Heyward (1989, 1994 and 1999), Rogers (2009), and Cheng (2011). I will also consider what a modern Christian ethic for non-heteronormative



relationships might be, taking in such concepts as justice, fidelity and mutuality (Heyward 1989; Thatcher 1993, 2012; Stuart 1995; Farley 2006).

Bisexuality within the context of marriage (heterosexual or same-sex) also features, with a focus on the potential for a functional and holistic bisexual identity whilst adhering to or reinterpreting 'Christian' ideals of monogamy/emotional exclusivity (Anderson 2012; Thatcher 1993; Heyward 1989). Should fidelity be defined differently within the context of a mixed-orientation marriage or relationship?

This study bridges these academic gaps in Christian sexual ethics concerning the bisexual question: namely, what might a holistic or embodied bisexual identity look like within a Christian ethical framework? Can the bisexual individual achieve a positive sexual identity and psychosexual wholeness within the context of their faith (with or without physical sexual expression)?

### **Qualitative Research Component**

In an attempt to find some answers to such questions, the lived experience of bisexual people of Christian faith and those who pastor them were considered via qualitative research. This qualitative research conforms to the contemporary experience pillar of the aforementioned Methodist Quadrilateral, the aspect which is traditionally ignored within 'them theologies' put forward by non-bi identified Christian sexual ethicists.

A four cell social science model was utilised, involving interviews in the UK and US with organisations that support/claim to support bisexual people of faith, as well as the recipients of pastoral support (both positive and negative experiences). The aim of the live research component was both to build up a contemporary picture of life as a bisexual Christian, but perhaps more importantly, to deduce from these interviews some fledgling concept of what a positive bisexual Christian identity might look like, based on existing relationship models and pastoral practices. I show what the actual lived reality of bisexual people of faith is, answering questions like, 'can they follow Jesus Christ and still achieve psycho-sexual/psycho-spiritual wholeness'? To put a rather blunt slant on the issue at hand, I address the question: are bisexual Christians doomed to a life of sexual frustration and mental illness?

I chose interview-based research for multiple reasons. Firstly, I am uniquely positioned, as a bisexual person of faith, to earn the trust of both secular and Christian LGBT individuals. I also

speak the language of faith organisations. I believe that interviews are therefore preferable to the closed format of email communication, in terms of building rapport and generating more material for further discussion and reflection.

In addition, many people are reluctant to put sensitive information 'in writing' that can be held on file, or permanently linked to a personal email account, whereas interviews can be carried out under a pseudonym with the option of being recorded for temporary transcription purposes only, to be deleted at a later date.

I also interviewed a range of age groups and ethnicities, sourcing interviewees from a number of key faith organisations in both the UK and US, as well as LGBT church satellite groups and personal contacts accrued from twenty-five years of church service in the UK. I contacted key bisexual organisations, such as the Boston Bisexual Resource Center and BiNet USA, as well as 'tweeting' widely and using other forms of social media to recruit participants.

It was eminently clear from the outset that a dual-nation cross-comparison had merit since the US offers a range of affirming churches and pastoral practices which are, for the most part, not available in the UK. This was the rationale behind extending this research outside of the UK - to optimize the discovery of potential solutions to the ethical conundrum posed by being bisexual and Christian. A comparative study of bisexual experience also serves as a useful indicator of the socio-cultural influences at work in issues surrounding bivisibility.

A study of the rhetoric of fundamentalist churches also encompasses the work of ex-gay ministries. Whilst this might appear to be a conflation of sexual identities - it is ex-gay, not ex-bi - it is felt that such organisations inevitably encounter bisexual people within the course of their work and indeed frequently subsume bisexuality within homosexual discourses. Before beginning the research, I was personally aware of at least one bisexual person of faith who has subjected themselves to aversion therapy of one sort or another, besides myself, and numerous lesbian and gay Christian acquaintances.

However, it became clear at the very early stages of gathering information and sourcing potential participants, that fundamentalist organisations were not willing to speak to me. This is perhaps in reaction to the US administration's recent clampdown on the activities of ex-gay

therapies in 2015<sup>14</sup>, mirrored in the UK by the victory of Transport for London over Core Issues Trust concerning the advertising of gay-aversion therapy on London buses.<sup>15</sup> Whatever the exact cause, it became apparent that approaching ex-gay ministries was a dead avenue. The little contact I did make with such outfits is documented within Chapters 9 and 10: *Bisexual Affirming Pastors & Educators in the US* and in **Appendix 5**.

Whilst it was initially my intention to interview secular bisexual groups and individuals as part of the live research component, I decided that this was beyond the scope of this specific faith-based project. That said, there is some need to understand the key presenting issues brought by bisexual people in general to pastoral and activist based organisations, as there is almost certainly some overlap in non bi-affirming experiences of those with or without a Christian faith. So, for background purposes, I contacted key bisexual support groups both in the UK and US, as a means of both uncovering positive pastoral practice and of assessing attitudes and relationship models which might prove influential in formulating a bisexual ethic for bisexual Christians. These background interviews are covered in Chapters 6, 9 and 10, which document bi affirming practices in the UK and US respectively.

Thus, the qualitative research presented in this doctoral dissertation takes the shape of a four cell format, interviewing four discrete groups of participants, divided equally between the UK and US where possible. In total, I interviewed 83 individuals, from both the US and UK. Further details of these research groups, as well as participant sourcing, data capture and information management techniques, are found in Chapter 5: *Qualitative Research Methodology*.

## **Overview of Chapters**

Chapter 1: *Bisexuality in Discourse* considers critical discourse on human sexuality from the post-war period onwards. I look at how poststructuralists such as Foucault and later Butler deconstructed normative statements regarding human sexuality. This includes contributions from feminist theologians (Heyward 1984, 1989), Queer theorists (Halperin 1995, 2009; Butler, 2004, 2006; Foucault 1984) and Queer theologians (Thatcher 1993, 1996, 1997, Stuart 1995,

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<sup>14</sup> See <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/04/how-christians-turned-against-gay-conversion-therapy/390570/>

<sup>15</sup> See <https://www.lifesitenews.com/news/christian-charity-ordered-to-pay-london-155000-after-city-bans-its-ex-gay-a>

1996, 1997, Cornwall 2011, Cheng 2011). A typology of bisexuality also features, including contributions from Halperin (2009) and Lingwood (2010).

Owing to wordage constraints, a historical overview of the etymology of bisexuality is provided in **Appendix 6**, and takes in the earliest documented incidences of bisexual behaviour in the Ancient World. It considers Galen and One Sex/Two Sex theory via Laqueur (1992) and continues with an etymology of bisexuality, considering how concepts of bisexuality were initially subsumed and conflated within discourses of homosexuality. **Appendix 6** also covers the work of the Napoleonic and Victorian sexologists, including amongst others the contributions of Benkert, Ellis, Weininger, Freud, Stekel, Hirschfeld and Krafft-Ebing.

*Chapter 2: Bisexuality in Science* continues to chart the development of bisexuality as a sexual identity and phenomena in the post-war years, focusing on leading names in the emerging science of sexology such as Kinsey et al (1948), Charlotte Wolff (1979), Fritz Klein (1978), Weinberg et al (1994) and Blumstein & Schwartz (1977) amongst others. Recent social science studies of bisexuality (Anderson & McCormack 2016) are also given coverage here.

*Chapter 3: Bisexuality as Burden* focuses on the unique set of psycho-social issues faced by individuals who identify as bisexual, from issues of exclusion and erasure to adverse mental health implications. These are informed by recent sociological and medical findings. In essence this chapter explores why bisexuality is so often seen as a social problem – from which the majority disengage to the detriment of the wellbeing of bisexual individuals.

*Chapter 4: Bisexuality & The Church* - contains a survey of how heteronormativity and monogamy entered Christian theocracies and ecclesiastical life from Constantine to present day and how this has led to a conspiracy of silence on bisexual issues both within mainstream dominations and the LGBT faith community in the Western Christian Church (Cantarella 2002, Heyward 1989). This chapter also contains a summary of both LGBT affirming and non-affirming positions on the seven so-called ‘clobber passages’ on homosexuality in the Bible and expressions of same sex love within the sacred texts (Vines 2015; Miner and Connoley 2002; Rogers 2008; Sharpe 2011)

*Chapter 5: Qualitative Research Methodology* outlines the methodological approach employed to record the lived experiences of those who identify as bisexual and Christian (and those who pastor them), from participant selection to data capture and management.

Chapters 6 to 12 contain both a background sweep of church conditions for bisexual Christians in the UK and USA, plus the specific issues highlighted by bisexual-identified participants from the four interview cells outlined in *Chapter Five: Qualitative Research Methodology*. These cells are (6) *Bi-affirming Pastors & Educators in the UK*; (7) *Bisexual Christians in the UK*; (8) *Bisexual Christians and Church Life in the UK*; (9); *Bi-affirming Pastors & Educators in the USA*; (10) *Bi-affirming Pastors & Educators in the USA: Pastoral Issues*; (11) *Bisexual Christians in the USA*; (12) *Bisexual Christians and Church Life in the USA*.

In the concluding chapter (Chapter 13), I draw together my findings to propose a framework that potentially enables bisexual Christians to live out an embodied or holistic faith, inside or outside of church communities.

### **‘Us’ Theology: Bisexuality as a Discrete Category**

In assessing and studying bi-friendly theology and practice, there will clearly be overlaps with the experiences of transgender and intersex people of faith, as fellow 'outsiders' within the monosexual hegemony. It is not my intention to cover this ground. Not only would this be beyond the scope of this project, it would also dilute the very point I am trying to make:- cishnormative people of faith who are bisexual need a theology to call their own. In the words of bisexual psychotherapist, Dr Mary Bradford:-

It remains the role of bisexual activists, writers, leaders and therapists to promote an affirmative approach to bisexuality and to support positive identity formation and self-acceptance for bisexual people. We can best do that by being out, and visible, and active and positive about our bisexuality. Keep researching, keep writing, keep speaking out (2011:512).

It is hoped ultimately that this research will result in advisory papers and accessible Church resources for accepting and nurturing bisexual people of faith. I am motivated by the words of Robyn Ochs, bisexual writer and activist:

Activists are cultural artists. They envision a world that does not yet exist, and then take action to create that world.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Robyn Ochs, accessed at <http://biwomenboston.org/>



## Part I





# CHAPTER 1

## Bisexuality in Discourse

Before beginning to contemplate the issues surrounding bisexuality and bi-visibility that will form the basis of this research, it is perhaps necessary to clarify exactly what we mean by bisexuality.

Therefore this opening chapter, *Bisexuality in Discourse*, tracks the recent etymology of bisexuality, from the post war period to present day, taking in both critical theory and sociological understandings. Due to wordage constraints, a decision was made to place historical material in appendix form. **Appendix 6** provides a history of bisexuality from a behavioural and etymological perspective. This takes in the work of leading sexologists, psychoanalysts and critical theorists from the last 150 years, such as Krafft-Ebing, Freud and Foucault, as well as considering bisexuality from a socio-historical standpoint. I also locate bisexuality within its New Testament context in **Appendix 6** and show how antisexual sentiments in the newly established Christian churches created a mind-body dualism that put pay to public displays of same-sex affection.

### 1.1 Contemporary Forays into the Bisexual Identity Crisis

One thing that just about everyone agrees on is that 'bisexual' is a problematic word (Garber, 1995).

Despite society's best efforts to ignore or suppress the phenomenon of bisexuality, there are, always have been and always will be, men and women who desire sex with both men and women (Eadie, 1993) - or MSMW and WSMW as they are referred to in health reports today, perhaps symptomatic of the malaise surrounding bisexual identities and terminology. So why does bisexuality remain so difficult to conceptualise?

Like all sexualities, 'bisexuality' has a history. A double history: of the ways in which there and have been sexual subjects who desire both men and women; and of the

ways in which that word has evolved and been deployed relatively recently (Eadie, 1993).<sup>17</sup>

As Eadie (1993) notes above, most histories of bisexuality take a two-fold approach, where the history and taxonomy of human sexual behaviours are accompanied by etymological studies of the evolution of terms used to describe these behaviours. This study is no different. Before progressing to social scientific studies of bisexual people in the next chapter, I need to establish a framework of reference for what is commonly understood by bisexuality.

## **1.2 Bisexual typology**

The inability to come up with a coherent definition of bisexuality has been greatly influenced by gender politics and sexual politics,<sup>18</sup> as I have already touched upon in the introduction to this study. When the word bisexual is employed, a number of sexual identities and behaviours may be inferred, with the result that bisexuality can easily become the ‘Stoke-on-Trent’ of sexual identities - a polycentric collection of satellite locations with no central hub.

As Anderson & McCormack note: ‘The most commonplace understanding of bisexuality is where someone maintains desires for men and women and publicly identifies as bisexual, yet people both call themselves and are called bisexual for reasons other than where their sexual attractions lie (2016: 33).

Writing in the *Journal of Bisexuality* in 2009, Halperin identifies thirteen potential definitions of a bisexual person (overleaf); others have found even more.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Eadie (1993) reproduced in extract from Storr (2013), p.120

<sup>18</sup> ‘... dominant lesbian and gay sexual epistemology ... has been structured not only to exclude bisexuality, but also to cement a heterosexual/homosexual dyad.’ As above, p.124

<sup>19</sup> e.g. Rullo (2010) who uncovered thirty-four different concepts of bisexuality, cited in (Rullo, Strassberg, & Miner)

Table 1.1 Halperin's thirteen types of bisexual people

	Bisexual people...
1	Are sexually attracted to males and females
2	Are not prevented from being sexually attracted to anyone because that person is male or female
3	Are sexually attracted to the individuals they are attracted to, whether those individuals are male or female
4	Are sexually attracted to their own sex but have a sexual history that includes sex with persons of the other sex
5	Are sexually attracted to the other sex but have a sexual history that includes sex with persons of their own sex
6	Are in a stable, long-term, sexual and erotic relationship with someone of their own sex but are also sexually attracted to persons of the other sex
7	Are in a stable, long-term, sexual and erotic relationship with someone of the other sex but are also sexually attracted to persons of their own sex
8	Have sex only with persons of their own sex who are gay and persons of the other sex who are heterosexual
9	Have sex only with other bisexuals (men or women)
10	Have sex only with persons of their own sex but identify as bisexual
11	Have sex only with persons of the other sex but identify as bisexual
12	Have sex with males and females but identify as gay or lesbian
13	Have sex with males and females but identify as heterosexual

Source: David M Halperin 'Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Bisexual', 2009

So are there really thirteen discrete categories of bisexual? And are all of these sexual behaviours bisexual in the strictest sense of the word – whatever that is, anyway? Are some more bisexual than others? And who decides who is “in” and who is “out”?

Psychologist JR Little (cited in Labriola, 2016<sup>20</sup>) also lists thirteen general categories of bisexual people, definitions used in US Asylum Law, amongst other places<sup>21</sup>. These definitions are seen in the table overleaf.

<sup>20</sup> See <http://www.kathylabriola.com/articles/what-is-bisexuality-who-is-bisexual>

<sup>21</sup> See <http://www.asylumlaw.org/docs/sexualminorities/1-General.pdf>

Table 1.2 Little's thirteen categories of bisexual people

1	Alternating bisexuals	may have a relationship with a man, and then after that relationship ends, may choose a female partner for a subsequent relationship, and many go back to a male partner next
2	Circumstantial bisexuals	primarily heterosexual, but will choose same sex partners only in situations where they have no access to other-sex partners, such as when in jail, in the military, or in a gender-segregated school
3	Concurrent relationship bisexuals	have primary relationship with one gender only but have other casual or secondary relationships with people of another gender at the same time
4	Conditional bisexuals	either straight or gay/lesbian, but will switch to a relationship with another gender for financial or career gain or for a specific purpose, such as young straight males who become gay prostitutes or lesbians who get married to men in order to gain acceptance from family members or to have children
5	Emotional bisexuals	have intimate emotional relationships with both men and women, but only have sexual relationships with one gender
6	Integrated bisexuals	Have more than one primary relationship at the same time, one with a man and one with a woman
7	Exploratory bisexuals	either straight or gay/lesbian, but have sex with another gender just to satisfy curiosity or "see what it's like"
8	Hedonistic bisexuals	primarily straight or gay/lesbian but will sometimes have sex with another gender primarily for fun or purely sexual satisfaction
9	Recreational bisexuals	primarily heterosexual but engage in gay or lesbian sex only when under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol
10	Isolated bisexuals	100% straight or gay/lesbian now but has had at one or more sexual experience with another gender in the past
11	Latent bisexuals	completely straight or gay lesbian in behavior but have strong desire for sex with another gender, but have never acted on it
12	Motivational bisexuals	straight women who have sex with other women only because a male partner insists on it to titillate him
13	Transitional bisexuals	temporarily identify as bisexual while in the process of moving from being straight to being gay or lesbian, or going from being gay or lesbian to being heterosexual

Source: *What is Bisexuality?*<sup>22</sup>

<sup>22</sup> See <http://www.cat-and-dragon.com/stef/Poly/Labriola/bisexual.html> 2007-09-26 Integrated bisexuals

These two tables show only a small degree of overlap. Whilst categories 1-7 in Halperin relate to sexual attraction (with categories 1-3 largely about perception only) and categories 8-13 relate to sex, Little focuses almost entirely on sexual activity and intimacy. We can find some correlation between Little's categories 5 and 11 – emotional and latent bisexuality respectively - with Halperin's categories 6 and 7, but that still leaves twenty-four categories of bisexuality that could be reasonably inferred from both tables - and neither author claims to have the monopoly on bisexual identity terminology.

Another sexologist, Martin Weinberg, speaks of *The Pure Type*, *The Mid Type*, *The Homosexual Leaning Type*, *The Heterosexual Leaning Type* and the *Varied Type* (Weinberg, 1994), leading him to conclude that 'there are *bisexualities* just as there are *homosexualities* and *heterosexualities*.'<sup>23</sup> All this before we even consider bi-encompassing sexual identities such as asexual<sup>24</sup>, omnisexual<sup>25</sup>, disexual<sup>26</sup>, demisexual<sup>27</sup>, duogamous<sup>28</sup>, intersex<sup>29</sup>, gender fluid<sup>30</sup>,

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<sup>23</sup> p.291, his italics

<sup>24</sup> 'A person who is sexually interested in other people regardless of gender including males, females, transsexual, transvestites, gender benders, hermaphrodites, intersexuals, androgenous people, and those with sex-chromosome anomaly such as Klinefelter Syndrome or Turner Syndrome.' (Source: <http://www.urbandictionary.com>)

<sup>25</sup> 'Generally interchangeable with pansexual. One whose romantic, emotional, or sexual attractions are geared towards others regardless of sex and/or gender expression.' (Ibid)

<sup>26</sup> 'A disexual is someone who is attracted to both men and women but considers the attracts (*sic*) distinct. Similar to a bisexual (disexuality can be considered a subset of bisexuality). A few disexuals are polyamorous and choose to date both a man and a woman at the same time. Can be shortened to 'di' although this is rarely used.' (Ibid)

<sup>27</sup> 'Demisexuals are characterized by a lack of sexual attraction toward any person unless they become deeply emotionally or romantically connected with a specific person or persons. The level of connection it takes for sexual desire to form is dependent on how close the relationship is rather than initial attraction. It is an orientation that is not chosen.' (Ibid)

<sup>28</sup> '*Duogamous* refers to a bisexual individual who has two exclusive sexual partners, one of each gender; duogamy refers to the state of an individual who keeps a monogamous heterosexual relationship and a monogamous homosexual relationship at the same time.' (Ibid)

<sup>29</sup> 'Intersex, in humans and other animals, is a variation in sex characteristics including chromosomes, gonads, or genitals that do not allow an individual to be distinctly identified as male or female. Such variation may involve genital ambiguity... Intersex people have all sorts of gender identities: like all individuals, some intersex individuals may be raised as a certain sex (male or female) but then identify with another gender identity later in life...' See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intersex>

<sup>30</sup> 'Gender Fluid is a gender identity best described as a dynamic mix of boy and girl. A person who is Gender Fluid may always feel like a mix of the two traditional genders, but may feel more boy some days, and more girl other days. Being Gender Fluid has nothing to do with which set of genitalia one has, nor their sexual orientation.' (Source: <http://www.urbandictionary.com>)

polyamorous,<sup>31</sup> the catch-all 'queer'<sup>32</sup>, bi-curious<sup>33</sup>, bi-intimate<sup>34</sup> and others that will undoubtedly emerge during the course of this research.

The definitional complexity is further compounded by the personal choices dual plus attracted individuals make in terms of self-regulated sexual identifiers. For instance, many traditionally defined bisexuals eschew the identity altogether in favour of one of the alternatives listed above or indeed assume another identity altogether (Anderson & McCormack, 2016; Alford-Harkey & Haffner, 2014). The relentless emergence of diverse sexual identities seems set to continue into the years ahead.

In the face of such terminological tangle weed, sexology writers usually choose one of two paths – they annihilate the stray plants and clear the path, or wade amongst the offshoots, arriving at no clear destination. The tension between an essentialist view of sexuality (not biological essentialism) and deconstructionism is summed up well by Halperin below:

One solution to this confusion would be to force some definitional clarity about bisexuality, to define it once and for all... Another solution, or non-solution, would be to treat the perpetual crisis of bisexual definition as a useful one for dramatizing the larger crisis in contemporary sexual definition, to see it as witness to a world in which we cannot make our sexual concepts do all the descriptive and analytic work we need them to do... (Halperin 2009: 453-454).

The Oxford English Dictionary could be seen as one such attempt to 'force some definitional clarity', describing the bisexual individual in simple terms as: '... a person who is sexually attracted to both men and women.' The Bisexual Index<sup>35</sup> pairs it down even further: 'A bisexual

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<sup>31</sup> The Oxford English Dictionary defines polyamory as: 'The fact of having simultaneous close emotional relationships with two or more other individuals, viewed as an alternative to monogamy, esp. in regard to matters of sexual fidelity; the custom or practice of engaging in multiple sexual relationships with the knowledge and consent of all partners concerned.'

<sup>32</sup> 'Queer: originally pejorative for gay, now being reclaimed by some gay men, lesbians, bisexuals and transgendered persons as a self-affirming umbrella term.' (Source: <http://www.urbandictionary.com>)

<sup>33</sup> 'Someone who has an intense interest in bisexuality, and/or suspects they may be bisexual, however, does not classify themselves as bisexual as of yet.' (Source: <http://www.urbandictionary.com>)

<sup>34</sup> No dictionary definition found, but generally held to mean emotional and/or physical interaction with both genders without full sexual activity. Some of the women interviewed by Martin Weinberg in his study of bisexuality in *Dual Attraction* self-identify as bi-intimate rather than bisexual. (1994:290)

<sup>35</sup> A UK based organisation set up in 2011 and instrumental in the production of the 2012 Open University Bisexuality Report, with the aim of promoting bi-visibility.

is someone who is attracted to more than one gender' and notes that 'the dictionary definition does not say 'currently', or 'equally' or 'simultaneously' or 'only.'<sup>36</sup> This broad definition also allows for relationships consisting of one or more non-cisgendered<sup>37</sup> partners.

Both these versions remove sexual activity from the equation. This will be of key relevance when we come to look at scriptural passages that deal with human sexuality, where - according to literalist interpretations of Christ's teachings on fidelity - the amorous gaze in itself is tantamount to adultery.<sup>38</sup> Whilst in all other matters of morality, temptation (or attraction) is secondary to activity, in this particular passage from Scripture, both sexual attraction and sexual activity are tarnished with the same brush. It is therefore of no surprise that systematic theology is not attractive to those without systematic sexual needs.

Susan George (1993), however, believes that bisexuality by definition involves sexual activity: '... I used what I consider to be the correct definition of bisexuality: that is, sexual and emotional desire for, and activity with, people of both sexes (1993: 25).

Stephen Lingwood (2010), however, offers a perspective on a bisexual identity that need not find validation in sexual activity:

I identify as bisexual because identifying as either gay or straight would feel dishonest; it would be denying part of myself that I judge to be significant, and would feel like being in the closet. If a person identifies as bisexual it means that his or her homosexuality and heterosexuality are significant enough for that person to consider himself or herself bisexual. A bisexual person does not need to act on those sexual feelings for both sexes to be happy (or to be bisexual) (2010: 33).

This is consonant with GLAAD's<sup>39</sup> definition of sexual orientation:

Sexual Orientation: The scientifically accurate term for an individual's enduring physical, romantic and/or emotional attraction to members of the same and/or opposite sex, including lesbian, gay, bisexual and heterosexual (straight) orientations...

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<sup>36</sup> See What is Bisexuality? <http://www.bisexualindex.org.uk/>

<sup>37</sup> Cisgendered = adj form of cisgender. 'The opposite of transgendered, someone who is cisgendered has a gender identity that agrees with their societally recognized sex.' <http://www.urbandictionary.com/>

<sup>38</sup> Matthew 5:28

<sup>39</sup> Gays & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation

People need not have had specific sexual experiences to know their own sexual orientation; in fact, they need not have had any sexual experience at all.<sup>40</sup>

Lingwood and GLAAD touch on two aspects that seem key in defining sexual orientation:

- Firstly, it is *enduring*, i.e. this orientation is a constant in one's life, in mind and/or in body, whether realised or not and allowing for temporal changes in intensity.
- Secondly, it is linked to wellness, i.e. a sexual orientation is a *whole body* constant, repression of which potentially leads to poor psycho-spiritual and/or psychosexual health.

Orientation is separate from sexual identity, which may be assumed by an individual for a raft of reasons, yet may or may not be representative of their true psychosexual needs.

### 1.3 Conclusion

In this opening chapter, I have attempted to clarify what is broadly meant by bisexuality, even if pinpointing an exact 'standard' of bisexual behaviour is not possible. This was with a view to laying the groundwork for future chapters. It is clear that a broad spectrum of romantic/sexual behaviours exist, which may fall under the bisexual umbrella.

The next chapter, *Bisexuality in Science*, will consider social scientific studies of bisexuality from the post-war period onwards, taking in the seminal works of Kinsey et al. and Fritz Klein, among others.

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<sup>40</sup> See <http://www.glaad.org/reference/lgb>



## CHAPTER 2

### Bisexuality in Science

As I established in the previous chapter, qualifying and quantifying dual attraction from a discursive perspective is highly problematic. As Anderson & McCormack (2016) note: 'While society now accepts that bisexuality exists, it is less clear, even among sexologists, what exactly it is' (2016: 19). This chapter seeks to demonstrate how social scientists in the field of sexology have attempted to conceptualise and measure bisexuality.

#### 2.1 Conceptual issues in qualifying bisexuality from a social scientific perspective

The difficulties posed in qualifying or defining bisexuality from a discursive perspective were highlighted in Chapter 1. From a social-scientific standpoint, bisexuality remains problematic to qualify and quantify. Take, for example, the broad brushstrokes of terminology applied by the American Psychological Association in their definition of sexual orientation (2008, cited in Anderson 2016). It is

... an enduring pattern of emotional, romantic, and/or sexual attractions to men, women, or both sexes. Sexual orientation also refers to a person's sense of identity based on those attractions, related behaviours, and membership in a community of others who share those attractions.

The complexities of definition are not aided by the existence of varied terminology between disciplines (Anderson & McCormack, 2016), an issue that also occurs within denominational literature when we consider bisexuality from a theological perspective. For example, within the Mormon Church, homosexuality/bisexuality is subsumed within 'same sex attraction' which is seen to be a more benign descriptor for what is still largely perceived as a lesser form of sexual expression within that particular denomination.<sup>41</sup> Savin-Williams' distinction between orientation and identity correlates to the essentialist and social-constructionist views of sexuality highlighted in the preceding chapter, with orientation as fixed and identity subject to historical and cultural influences (see Savin-Williams 1998). These historical

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<sup>41</sup> See [www.mormon.org/faq/stand-on-homosexuality](http://www.mormon.org/faq/stand-on-homosexuality)

and cultural influences affect our personal typologies of sexuality, making definitions of sexuality determined by generational factors (Plummer 2010).

Anderson & McCormack (2016) speak of an additional category which is often ignored in attempts to ‘measure’ bisexuality, namely emotional orientation. The lack of attention paid to those who feel emotional, romantic or social attraction towards members of both sexes potentially skews statistics of bisexual incidence and exacerbates bisexual erasure in society (Anderson & McCormack, 2016).

They have created a useful table of definitions which, while by no means representative of the full range of conceptual positions, certainly provides clarity on how we might distinguish between the various components of what we understand by human sexuality.

*Table 2.1: Anderson & McCormack’s Definitions of Human Sexuality*

<i>Sexuality</i> is an umbrella term for all aspects of sexual direction, including one’s attractions, behaviours, identities and emotional orientation.
<i>Sexual orientation</i> refers to the gendered-direction of one’s sexual attractions
<i>Sexual attraction</i> refers to the sexual desires a person has. It is assumed to be consistent with one’s masturbatory fantasies.
<i>Sexual identity</i> refers to how one views their own sexuality in light of cultural understandings of sexuality.
<i>Sexual behaviour</i> refers to what consensual sexual acts one engages in.
<i>Emotional orientation</i> refers to the gendered-direction of one’s desires for emotional intimacy.

If we were to define bisexuality to include all of the above aspects, then the statistics for bisexuality would be greatly elevated. Such figures would also include those who are emotionally attracted to members of both sexes, yet do not ‘follow through’ physically, to those who engage in ‘situational’ sexual activity (Kunzel, 2002) with both same sex and opposite sex partners, yet do not self-identify as bisexual.

This is not necessarily new. Freud, for example, distinguished between ‘amphigenic inverts’ – those who are attracted to both the same and opposite sex – and ‘contingent inverts’, namely those who under certain circumstances, such as prison (Kunzel, 2002) or same-sex boarding schools, engage in homosexual activity in the absence of availability of the (desired) opposite sex (Freud, 1991).

We might also add recreational sex to the growing list of behaviours that may or may not be deemed bisexual. Boykin (2006) writes about African-American men who have sex with other men yet claim a heterosexual identity. This practice is known colloquially as being ‘on the down low’ (Boykin, 2006). Similarly, a BBC documentary broadcast in October 2015 titled *How Gay is Pakistan* revealed widespread homosexual activity between Pakistani working-class men who otherwise identify as heterosexual.<sup>42</sup> Carrier (1985) has conducted ethnographical studies of Mexican men who take multiple male partners whilst maintaining a heterosexual identity (Carrier, 1985).

As regards to female bisexuals, ‘performative bisexuality’ is widely documented within the entertainment industry. Breanne Fahs (2011) describes the:

... rapidly proliferating phenomenon of heterosexual-identified women reporting that they engage in performative bisexuality. Unlike other forms of bisexual erotic behaviour, performative bisexuality is defined primarily as engaging in homoerotic acts with other women, usually in front of men and in the context of social settings such as fraternity parties, bars, clubs, and other crowded, sexualized spaces (2011: 24).

It has become almost a regular occurrence for female celebrities to engage in a sensual/sexual embrace at awards ceremonies for the presumed titillation of the viewing public (and perhaps to boost merchandise sales).<sup>43</sup> Pop star Madonna famously kissed both Britney Spears and Christine Aguilera at the 20<sup>th</sup> MTV Video Music Awards in New York in 2003.<sup>44</sup> Meanwhile, the *Daily Mail* in the UK also charted the rise of the ‘Flexi-Sexy Female’ in an article from 2013.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> See <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b06kjj32>

<sup>43</sup> eg. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-3105249/Amy-Schumer-shares-passionate-smooch-Tina-Fey-honoured-Peabody-Awards.html>

<sup>44</sup> See <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-194169/Madonna-Britney-kiss.html>

<sup>45</sup> See <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-2514246/Rise-female-flexi-sexual-Why-women-far-likely-men-gay-fling.html>

Do the behaviours outlined above make the individuals concerned bisexual, whether they choose to assume this identity or not? That remains open to debate.

Another modern phenomenon is the growing cultural acceptance of so-called 'bromances' between men, where physical closeness including kissing may take place, yet a heterosexual identity is maintained by the individuals in question. Anderson (2014) discusses the ability of these relationships to encompass physical tactility, perhaps over and above the closeness these men feel to opposite sex partners or friends. Plummer (2010) links the phenomenon of the 'bromance' to generational shifts in perceptions of sexuality, where touching and public displays of affection between men have gained acceptability where previously these acts would have been deemed homosexual (though in fairness, allegations of homosexuality are never far off, taking the 2015 example of soccer star Cristiano Ronaldo and his bromantic partner, Moroccan kickboxer Badr Hari.<sup>46</sup>)

Anderson & Adams (2011) have found that bromantic partners have acknowledged bisexuality as a potential component in their sexual make-up (E. Anderson & Adams, 2011). Even within the 'bromance' therefore, there is a degree of ambiguity as to whether the players within these friendships are bisexual or not, which is perhaps unsurprising, since we have already established that bisexuality itself is notoriously difficult to conceptualise (Anderson & McCormack, 2016; Garber, 1995), let alone variations of it.

Attitudes towards bisexuality are further impacted by Anderson & McCormack's concept of 'homophobia' – defined as 'the fear of being labelled homosexual' (Anderson & McCormack, 2016) by engaging in gender atypical behaviour. The higher the levels of homophobia in society, the less acceptable any same-sex activity becomes, including bisexuality. Where homophobia decreases, there is consequently increased public acceptance of homoerotic and bisexual behaviour.

Anderson has also found a stronger application of what he terms the 'one time rule of homosexuality' within homophobic societies (E. Anderson, 2008). This rule dictates that just a singular same-sex incidence condemns a person to a lifetime of suspicion of homosexuality, though that individual may identify as heterosexual or bisexual. The 'one time rule' operates

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<sup>46</sup> See <http://www.dnaindia.com/sport/report-is-cristiano-ronaldo-involved-in-a-gay-relationship-with-badr-hari-2152280>

not only to erase bisexuality as a bona-fide identity in and of itself, it also creates a climate of fear where bisexual people may repress their same-sex attracted feelings for fear of being labelled homosexual.

For the purposes of a theological study of bisexuality, Scripture would generally distinguish between 'temptation' and 'sin' - with temptation representing desire or a predisposition towards and sin being the physical 'follow through' act.<sup>47</sup> With this in mind, the question at the heart of any theological debate on bisexuality is not simply 'what is bisexuality,' but 'what is bisexuality and is it sinful?' The morality aspect distinguishes a theological understanding of bisexuality from a purely social-scientific enquiry and will be central to my exploration of bisexuality and the church in Chapter 4.

## **2.2 Conceptual issues in quantifying bisexuality from a social science perspective**

I have established above, insofar as we can speak of 'establishing' a bisexual identity, that what may be termed bisexual behaviour is wide-ranging, from penetrative sex with both sexes to tactile same-sex friendships and performative bisexuality. While there may be a broad spectrum of views on what bisexuality is, we can nevertheless qualify it to a certain degree.

How, though, do we attempt to quantify or 'measure' bisexuality? Again, this is a complex matter, as Anderson & McCormack (2016) note:

It is challenging not just because of the complex social and cultural patterns of how people identify, but also because people's identities sometimes change over time. It is further complicated by the fact that many people are not open about their sexual minority status. Matters are further complicated when one considers the complexity of sexuality and whether they are measuring behaviour, identity, orientation, or any combination of those or any other variable. Furthermore, surveys are poor indicators of the type of experience that any given bisexual is having when it concerns his sexual identity as they rarely account for the complexity of human identity (2016: 35).

As Savin-Williams points out (2001), stigmatisation in times of increased homophobia leads to concealment on the part of respondents, resulting in flawed statistics.

A number of physiological attempts to measure sexuality have been made in recent times, including arousal-based methods such as phallometric testing and pupil dilation, as well as less invasive methods which assess the reactions of individuals to certain visual materials. (These

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<sup>47</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:13 'No temptation has seized you except what is common to man' with regard to sexual sin

are summarised in Anderson & McCormack (2016) but are not deemed directly relevant to this study.) The problematic and invasive nature of physiological tests for sexuality have outweighed their usefulness, with the result that self-reporting remains the most widespread means of quantifying bisexual incidence (Anderson & McCormack, 2016).

## **2.3 Social scientific studies of bisexuality**

In the section below, I present the main sexological surveys which deal (to various degrees) with bisexuality.

### **2.3.1 Kinsey, Pomeroy & Martin**

The name perhaps most frequently associated with post war sexology studies is that of Alfred C Kinsey. In 1948, Kinsey - along with Wardell B Pomeroy and Clyde E Martin - published the ground-breaking study, *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male*, followed by *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Female* in 1953. Both works sent US religious leaders and social commentators into apoplexy, but particularly the former, which reported that around 37% of American males had engaged in homosexual activity at some point in their lives. Kinsey lifted the lid on binary thought when it came to the sexuality of the American public:

Not all things are black nor all things white. It is a fundamental of taxonomy that nature rarely deals with discrete categories. Only the human mind invents categories and tries to force facts into separated pigeon-holes. The living world is a continuum in each and every one of its aspects. The sooner we learn this concerning human sexual behaviour the sooner we shall reach a sound understanding of the realities of sex (Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Martin, 1948)<sup>48</sup>.

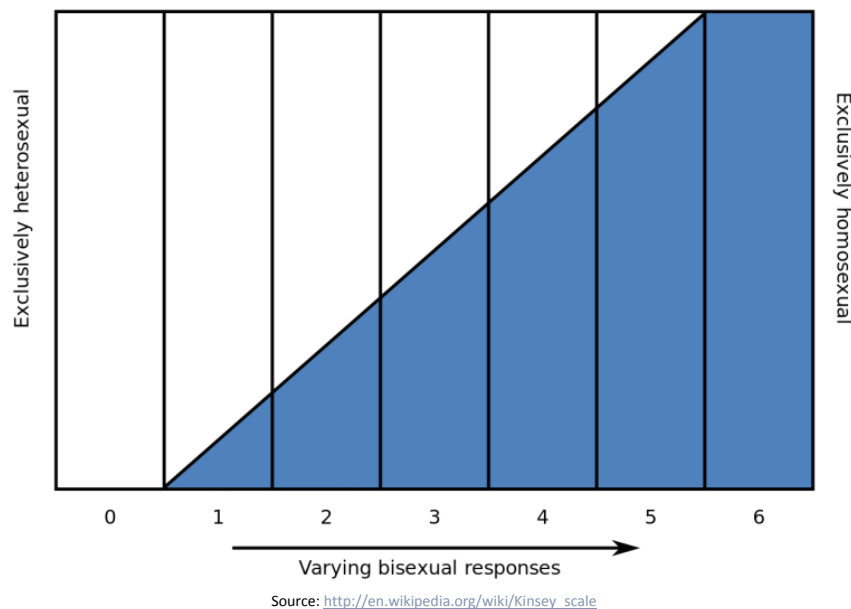
Though his methodology and findings were disputed, Kinsey's continuum model of human sexuality, *The Kinsey Scale*, remains influential to this day. The Kinsey Scale rates human sexuality from total heterosexuality (0) to total homosexuality (6), with X representing asexuality. It works on a continuum, replacing the binary categories of heterosexual and homosexual and operates on a dual basis, where sexuality is based on both actual sexual experience and psychosexual reactions.

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<sup>48</sup> Cited in Storr (2013), p.33

Kinsey accepted the word bisexual grudgingly, believing it to be a concept from the natural world relating to hermaphroditism in animals and plants<sup>49</sup> and was therefore a total misnomer in terms of human sexuality. For Kinsey, the notion that bisexual people were anatomically confused or physiologically divergent in some way, was untenable. There was no hybrid 'unisexual' individual, only a sliding scale of sexual experience with, and sexual attraction towards, opposite or same sex objects of desire. The individual remained male or female.

*Table 2.2: The Kinsey Scale*



Kinsey's scale, however, had its limitations. It portrayed a very static picture of human sexuality, which did not allow for preferential shifts over time. Neither did it account for the finer subtleties of aspirational sexuality versus actual sexual practice, nor the distorting effect of 'identity craving' on self-proclaimed sexualities.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>49</sup> 'It should... be used with the understanding that it is patterned on the words heterosexual and homosexual and, like them, refers to the sex of the partner, and proves nothing about the constitution of the person who is labelled bisexual.' (Kinsey cited in Storr 1999:37)

<sup>50</sup> Fritz Klein wrote 'We tend to categorize people, to put them into the most readily available group. In the worlds of commerce, government, and religion, this is to some degree logical. That this mistaken practice is also adopted by the individual in his or her search for self-identity – and held onto at all costs for lack of a suitable alternative – is tragic.' (F Klein cited in Storr (2013), p.40)

Most significantly, perhaps, Kinsey practised what has come to be known as the *zero-sum game of sexuality* (Anderson & McCormack, 2016; Sell, 1997; Shively, Jones, & De Cecco, 1984), where homosexuality is pitted against heterosexuality – i.e. the more homosexual one is, the less heterosexual. In this way, binary monosexual categories of homo- and heterosexuality are still in operation; there is no Kleinian ‘bisexual option’. Renowned US sexologists, Masters and Johnson, also questioned the broad categorisation of participants, which would place a very sexually active homosexual alongside a non-active individual with an active homoerotic fantasy life (Masters & Johnson, 1979). A further criticism was that participants were allowed to select their position on the Kinsey continuum, a practice that would clearly distort results (Gonsiorek, Sell, & Weinrich, 1995) as we are not always the best judges of our individual make-up.

### 2.3.2 Charlotte Wolff

Dr Charlotte Wolff, a German psychiatrist, fled Nazi Germany in the 1930s and settled in London alongside literary luminaries such as Virginia Woolf and Aldous Huxley. In 1977, as a sequel to *Love Between Women* (1971), Wolff published *Bisexuality: A Study*, which was revised in 1979 (Wolff, 1979). Part historical timeline, part sex survey, it focussed solely on bisexuality - one of the first works to do so alongside Fritz Klein.

In *Bisexuality: A Study*, Wolff provided an overview of sexology studies from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century and presented the findings of 150 interviews conducted with self-identified bisexual men and women, interviewing an equal number of each. Whilst Wolff’s work appears dated now, she championed the bisexual cause by presenting bisexuality as nature not pathology. Heterosexuality and homosexuality, Wolff argued, were the result of cultural brainwashing (Wolff, 1979). Monosexuality, not bisexuality, was unnatural for Wolff – indeed it was tragic that individuals had self-identified as such. With this sentiment Wolff echoes the ideas of Stekel outlined in **Appendix 6** (Stekel, 1922; Wolff, 1979).

Wolff is rarely included in histories of sexology, a fact noted by Brennan & Heggarty (T. Brennan & Heggarty, 2012), despite being one of very few social scientists of that era to write exclusively on bisexuality. This could, of course, be explained by her gender. Largely criticised



for the unscientific approaches she adopted, including analysis of participants' dreams, Wolff remained important for challenging monosexist thinking and promoting a separate bisexual identity.

### 2.3.3 Fritz Klein

The name specifically associated in modern times with bisexuality is that of Fritz Klein, founder of the American Institute of Bisexuality, who published *The Bisexual Option: A Concept of One Hundred Percent Intimacy* in 1978. F Klein agreed with Wilhelm Stekel, writing half a century before, that bisexuality was a combination of hetero- and homosexual behaviour, and not a hybrid gender (F. Klein, 1993; Stekel, 1922). F Klein spoke of the dangers inherent in limiting our sexual and emotional connections - and thereby our very humanity - through the insistence on categories that do not represent the uniqueness of each individual. The psychosexual existence of the sexually ambiguous - those who fall between homosexuality and heterosexuality - is thus denied. This creates an 'either-or' syndrome in which the losers are those who cannot, in the words of F Klein, 'sit around the communal fire not only in warmth but in dignity.'<sup>51</sup> As fellowship, warmth and dignity are key values espoused by the Christian Church, it will be interesting to see how 'in-betweeners' are integrated/not integrated within faith communities in Chapter 4: *Bisexuality and the Church*.

*The Klein Sexual Orientation Grid* (KSOG) adopted a multidimensional approach to human sexuality, taking into account past, present and aspirational psychosexual behaviour. It was, in the words of F Klein, 'an attempt to better demarcate and understand the complexities of human sexual attitudes, emotions and behaviours.'<sup>52</sup> In highlighting the existence of sexual ambiguity, and by refusing to give credence to notions of standardised male and female behaviour, F Klein gave bisexual people a voice and an identity for the first time. Bisexuality, for F Klein, was the ability to connect emotionally and/or sexually with men or women at any point in time – including in our thought lives - and was not linked to anatomical difference or gender confusion.

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<sup>51</sup> Cited in Storr (2013), p.40

<sup>52</sup> Ibid p.53

The weakness of the Klein method was again that it adopted the zero-sum approach, where homosexuality and heterosexuality are measured against one another, as is clear from the grid below. Whilst it accounted for changes in sexual identity over time - where Kinsey's did not - the KSOG still did not allow space for multiple or nuanced sexual identities (Galupo, Mitchell, Gryniewicz, & Davis, 2014).

*Table 2.3: The Klein Sexuality Grid*

The Klein Sexuality Grid				
	Variable	Past	Present	Ideal
A	Sexual Attraction			
B	Sexual Behavior			
C	Sexual Fantasies			
D	Emotional Preference			
E	Social Preference			
F	Heterosexual/Homosexual Lifestyle			
G	Self Identification			

For Variables A to E:

- 1 = Other sex only
- 2 = Other sex mostly
- 3 = Other sex somewhat more
- 4 = Both sexes
- 5 = Same sex somewhat more
- 6 = Same sex mostly
- 7 = Same sex only

For Variables F and G:

- 1 = Heterosexual only
- 2 = Heterosexual mostly
- 3 = Heterosexual somewhat more
- 4 = Hetero/Gay-Lesbian equally
- 5 = Gay/Lesbian somewhat more
- 6 = Gay/Lesbian mostly
- 7 = Gay/Lesbian only

Source: <http://www.americaninstituteofbisexuality.org/thekleingrid/>

#### 2.3.4 Blumstein & Schwartz

Also writing in 1977, Philip W. Blumstein and Pepper Schwartz questioned the collective bisexual identity postulated by Fritz Klein, Charlotte Wolff and others. In their view, too little attention had been paid to differences in male and female bisexuality, creating a monolithic

entity called bisexuality of equal application to men and women (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1977). For them, Klein and his contemporaries were still guilty of over-simplifying sexual ambiguity and ignoring many of the complexities thrown up by empirical data. Blumstein and Schwartz commented:

... the word bisexuality gives a misleading sense of fixedness to a sex-object choice, suggesting as it does a person in the middle, equidistant from heterosexuality and from homosexuality, equally erotically disposed to one gender or the other. Our data show that exceedingly few people come so neatly packaged, thus if we were to be really true to Kinsey's idea of a sexual continuum, we would instead use the preferable term, *ambisexuality*, connoting some ability for a person to eroticize both genders under some circumstances. However, *bisexuality* seems to have already become entrenched in our language, and will have to settle for it, rather than the term Kinsey would have preferred (Cited in M.Storr 2013: 61).

Blumstein and Schwartz's empirical studies found no proof of a 'prototypic bisexual career' or patterns of behaviour among bisexuals, and leading psychosexual theories proved to be of little use in understanding respondents (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1977). In addition, they found that male bisexuals were far more concerned with the implications of same-sex activity on their perceived masculinity, and were more likely to have sex with strangers. Bisexual women, on the other hand, saw same sex attachment as a natural extension of an existing emotional attachment to a female friend.

### **2.3.5 Weinberg, Williams & Pryor**

Blumstein & Schwartz's findings of separate male and female bisexual identities were echoed in Weinberg, Williams & Pryor's bisexual survey published in *Dual Attraction: Understanding Bisexuality* (Weinberg, 1994).

These manifestations of bisexuality in which the sexual component is paramount are characteristic of men. For women, the disconnection between gender and sexual preference seems to follow a different route. It is not the pursuit of sex that is the central issue but rather the pursuit of intimacy. Following gender scripts for heterosexuality brings women to heterosexual sex, but men do not always satisfy their emotional needs for intimacy and closeness. Their bisexuality may centre around a close relationship with another woman in which there is little or no sex. Thus the implication for "sexual preference" is less direct – some of our female respondents emphasized that their behaviour was bi-intimate rather than bisexual (1994: 289).

Their survey of 800 homosexual, heterosexual and bisexual people in the San Francisco Bay Area was the first large-scale social-scientific sexological research to focus both on bisexuality and bisexual variation between the genders. Weinberg et al discovered marked differences between bisexual men and women, as well as surprising statistics regarding the longevity of relationships sustained by bisexual people, whether monogamously or duogamously. Bisexual people were also seen to be the most sexually fluid over time of the three study groups. Weinberg et al.'s survey was also significant in terms of timing – conducted post HIV/AIDS, they were able to study the social and sexual impact of AIDS on the relationship choices of bisexual men and women (Weinberg, 1994).

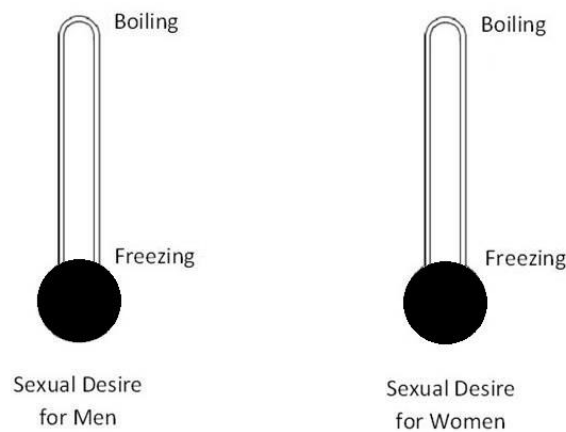
### **2.3.6 Anderson & McCormack**

Whilst the studies above measured bisexual variation, they did not measure sex drive. As highlighted earlier, neither the Kinsey nor Klein models offered functionality for measuring intensity or frequency of arousal and sexual expression. This meant that a person with a strong sex drive exclusively towards same sex objects of desire could end up in the same place on the continuum as a person with low sex drive exclusively towards the same sex. In such a scenario, a bisexual person with a normal or high sex drive could well have stronger physical feelings towards a same sex object of desire than his 100% homosexual peer with low sex drive (or indeed zero sex drive in the case of the asexual person).

As Anderson & McCormack (2016) note: 'the effect of the strength of sexual desire on identity and behaviour is under-theorized in studies of sexuality' (2016: 43). To this end, Anderson & McCormack have created the Sexuality Thermometers, reproduced overleaf. The value and concept of the Sexuality Thermometers are outlined as follows:

The strength of our sexuality thermometers is that they enable participants to quickly and accurately describe the strength of their sexual desire in relation to each sex independently (no zero-sum game). It then also accounts for asexuality and the strength of one's sexual desires (2016: 44).

*Table 2.4 Anderson & McCormack's Sexuality Thermometers*



Draw a line on each thermometer to indicate the strength of your sexual desires for each sex

Reproduced with kind permission (Anderson & McCormack, 2016)

Clearly the thermometer approach does not offer highly accurate measures of sexual desire or orientation, but it does not claim to do so, and it is arguable whether any of its predecessors did either. But it at least measures sex drive towards men and women independently. This means that is no zero-sum effect taking place, because homosexual feelings are not offset against heterosexual ones and asexuality or bisexuality can be measured, since the thermometers account for sex drive and intensity of feeling, not just the direction of travel.

## **2.4 Population based surveys of bisexuality**

As well as Kinsey's seminal survey of the sexuality of the United States in 1948, several attempts have been made to measure the LGB population both in the UK and US (and undoubtedly elsewhere, but this is beyond the remit of this project). These are summarised in Anderson & McCormack (2016) and readily available online, so I have not elected not to detail these here.

However, in terms of specific data for bisexual incidence in the UK/US in recent years, the most recent large-scale population census in the UK to contain specific questions around sexual orientation was the 2015 Integrated Household Survey (IHS). This found that 1.1% of the adult

population identified as gay or lesbian and 0.5% as bisexual.<sup>53</sup> (The 2011 National Census omitted a question on sexuality as results from focus groups suggested the information provided would not be accurate owing to concerns from respondents surrounding privacy<sup>54</sup>).

In 2011, the Williams Institute published its survey on the LGBT population of the United States and found that:

Among adults who identify as LGB, bisexuals comprise a slight majority (1.8% compared to 1.7% who identify as lesbian or gay). Women are substantially more likely than men to identify as bisexual. Bisexuals comprise more than half of the lesbian and bisexual population among women in eight of the nine surveys considered in the brief. Conversely, gay men comprise substantially more than half of gay and bisexual men in seven of the nine surveys.<sup>55</sup>

This data, whilst nearly five years old now, is backed up by recent medical findings, which repeatedly suggest that women are more likely to identify as bisexual than men.<sup>56</sup> For example, a study carried out by the University of Notre Dame in Indiana found that women are three times more likely to identify as bisexual than their male peers.<sup>57</sup>

In the first large-scale government survey measuring Americans' sexual orientation, the NHIS reported in July 2014 that 1.6 percent of Americans identify as gay or lesbian and 0.7 percent identify as bisexual.<sup>58</sup>

These surveys, as well as other smaller studies widely available online<sup>59</sup>, show a statistical range for bisexuality of between 0.5% and 4% of the population in both the UK and US - though generally towards the lower end. There appears to be a far higher incidence of female bisexuality. Earlier sexological studies detailed in this chapter also demonstrates clear attitudinal and behavioural differences between male and female bisexual people. While this does not offset the need to challenge binary thought on sexuality or gender behaviour, it does

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<sup>53</sup> Cited in <http://www.pinknews.co.uk/2015/10/01/why-are-there-more-bisexual-women-than-bisexual-men/>

<sup>54</sup> See [https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/absence\\_of\\_sexual\\_orientation\\_fr](https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/absence_of_sexual_orientation_fr)

<sup>55</sup> See <http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Gates-How-Many-People-LGBT-Apr-2011.pdf>

<sup>56</sup> See <http://www.pinknews.co.uk/2015/10/01/why-are-there-more-bisexual-women-than-bisexual-men/>

<sup>57</sup> See <http://www.pinknews.co.uk/2015/08/25/women-three-times-as-likely-to-be-bisexual-study-finds>

<sup>58</sup> See <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nhsr>

<sup>59</sup> e.g. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/LGBT\\_demographics\\_of\\_the\\_United\\_States](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/LGBT_demographics_of_the_United_States)

call into question whether we can speak of a unisexual bisexual identity equally applicable to both men and women.

## **2.5 Conclusion**

This chapter has discussed social scientific studies into bisexuality, discussing the work of leading sexologists and social scientists in modern times. It can be seen that a vast range of understandings of bisexuality exist, from one-off emotional attraction to more than one gender, to sexual activity with multiple genders over a lifespan. In addition, bisexual behaviours may differ between genders, with female individuals far more likely to own a bisexual identity than their male counterparts, adding to the complexity of how bisexuality is defined as a sexual orientation.

A further complication relates to self-identity. Sexual orientation statistics in population censuses do not necessarily give an accurate picture of whether bisexual behaviour is practised, as respondents may or may not view their different gendered attractions to constitute an orientation as such, due to their intensity or (non) frequency of occurrence.

Sociological and medical findings concerning the mental health of bisexual people are dealt with in the next chapter, when we consider bisexuality as a social burden.





## CHAPTER 3

### Bisexuality as Burden

As indicated at the end of the previous chapter, this chapter looks at the socio-cultural problems encountered by bisexual people in general, including mental health issues. The specific situation of the Christian bisexual is dealt with explicitly in Chapter 4: *Bisexuality & the Church*.

Anderson & McCormack (2016) describe bisexual burden as ‘the myriad of problems that bisexuals face beyond those experienced by gays and lesbians (2016: 55)’. Bisexuality as burden will consider whether bisexual people are victims of a socio-cultural climate that pathologises those who do not fit into dichotomous categories, or conversely, whether society itself is pathologised by sexual ‘misfits’. To cast an appropriate theological slant on the debate: are bisexuals people more sinned against than sinning?

#### 3.1 Bisexual Erasure

In their preface to *Sexuality & the Sacred*, writing in (1994), Nelson & Longfellow expressed their disappointment in ‘the dearth of adequate theological treatments of... bisexuality’ (1994: xvi). Nearly fifteen years later, Ulrich Gooß (2008) acknowledged that bisexuality was now accepted as a form of sexuality: ‘...however, this acceptance is limited to the mere use of the term, without close consideration of the accompanying lack of clarity and associated problems (2008: 13).’ The ‘laundry list’ attitude towards bisexual people is still largely prevalent, where the B is nominally included in the titles and subtitles of ‘LGBT’ sociological, sexological or theological publications, yet is rarely explicated within the contents:

Although outnumbering homosexuals, bisexuals have been squeezed within the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) alphabet soup. Here, bisexuality has frequently been erased both culturally and from academic investigation (Anderson & McCormack 2016: 6).

Bisexual erasure (or invisibility) relates to the way in which the existence and experiences of bisexual people are omitted from anthologies, academic literature, health and social policy, histories and ethnographies, church doctrines and liturgies, visual media and popular culture – in short, all manner of communication made by people for consumption by other people.

This erasure takes place by what is known in theological speak as ‘sins of omission and commission’<sup>60</sup> – i.e. erasure is caused by what people *don’t* do to support bisexual people through ignorance and apathy, as well as what they actively do to bisexual people through biphobic attitudes and actions. The concept of biphobia will be discussed in further detail in 3.2 The ‘Sin’ of Bisexuality.

As a 2011 report on bi-visibility produced by the San Francisco Human Rights Commission (SFHRC, 2011) noted:

Bisexuals experience high rates of being ignored, discriminated against, demonized, or rendered invisible by both the heterosexual world and the lesbian and gay communities. Often, the entire sexual orientation is branded as invalid, immoral, or irrelevant. Despite years of activism and the largest population within the LGBT community, the needs of bisexuals still go unaddressed and their very existence is still called into question. This erasure has serious consequences on bisexuals’ health, economic well-being, and funding for bi organizations and programmes (2011: 7).

As Anderson & McCormack state: ‘... the overwhelming social attitude toward bisexuality has been one of denial, erasure, and stigma. The prejudice and stigma associated with bisexuality is compounded by the lack of academic research into bisexuality as a unique sexual identity (2016: 57).

This lack of research extends to the field of applied theology, as we see in Chapter 4, where there exists an almost complete absence of works focusing specifically on bisexuality and Christianity. Canadian theologian Margaret Robinson has written an accessible chapter which summarises the bi theological position in *The Oxford Handbook of Sexuality, Theology & Gender* (Thatcher, 2014) but works which attempt to tackle the complexities head on, rather than simply describe the complexities of interstitial identities, are few and far between. Whilst

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<sup>60</sup> See James 4:17: ‘Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn’t do it, sins.’

queer theologians such as the late Marcella Althaus-Reid (2002, 2003) and Carter Heyward (1984; 1989) have written of bisexuality from a liberation theology perspective, such works are arguably impenetrable to the lay person.<sup>61</sup> Though undoubtedly significant in the evolution of theological discourses on human sexuality, bisexual theology through the lens of liberation theology offers little practical guidance and therefore little sense of resolution to the difficult ethical and ontological conundrum of 'how to be' a bisexual Christian - though providing solutions has admittedly never been the bespoke aim of either liberation or queer theologies (Goss, 1996).

Rather the central tenet of liberation and queer theologies is to mimic the *Magnificat*<sup>62</sup> in Scripture, through the disempowerment of the mighty and the elevation of the lowly (Cheng, 2011). It is thus rather ironic that bisexual erasure is to some degree increased by the inaccessibility of elevated academic discourses such as these. Queer theology can only 'shock people out of their complacency and help them see theology in a new light' (Cheng 2011: 9) if the complacent are able to access and grasp the theology in the first place. Whilst so-called embodied theology purports to be user-friendly and adaptable to real life situations (Nelson, 1994), this has not been my experience or indeed that of other bisexual scholars I have spoken to, Christian and atheist alike.

Works of queer theology such as Goss & West's *Take Back the Word* (R. Goss & West, 2000), Cornwall's *Controversies in Queer Theology* (Cornwall, 2011), *Queering Christianity: Finding a Place at the Table for LGBTQI Christians* (Shore-Goss, Bohache, Cheng, & West, 2013) or Stuart's *Religion is a Queer Thing* (Stuart, 1997), though explicitly Christian in content, subsume bisexuality under the queer umbrella. Queer anthologies do not count, in my view, as works of bisexual theology, though they may illuminate key issues in biblical hermeneutics and challenge binary approaches to sexuality in Scripture. Often they actually do more to erase

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<sup>61</sup> For example, on critical bisexuality, Althaus-Reid (Althaus-Reid, 2003) writes: 'Because critical bisexuality means here to think in a triadic way, it is not complementary but permutative, thus providing a location of non-rigid exchanges amongst people's actions and reflections, as a base for a theology rooted in more genuine (and diverse) dialogues.' (2003: 16) On critical bisexual theologians, she writes: 'Critical Bisexual theologians produce a shift in the disciplinary systematisation of theological labour and domesticity by simply displacing what we call the politics of mono-loving.' (2003:19)

<sup>62</sup> See Luke 1:52

bisexual identities under the queer catch-all than to include bisexual people 'at the table,' a fact noted by Angelides (2001) and Callis (2009) amongst others. As Callis notes:

... queer theory has ignored, and continues to ignore, questions of bisexuality and bisexual identity. It seems a curious gap, keeping in the mind the aim of most queer theorists: the destabilization of gender and sexual binaries. Bisexuality, which cannot help but be uniquely placed inside/outside of the binary of heterosexuality/homosexuality, seems to be an ideal starting point for deconstruction (2009: 219).

From a secular standpoint, bisexual publications from across the disciplines exist. Weise (1992) writes on bisexuality and feminism and George (1993) on bisexual women. Firestein (1996, 2007) and Fox (2013; 2014) both write from a psychotherapy perspective. Ochs & Rowley (2005), Kolodny (2000), Hutchins & Kaahumanu (1999) and The Bisexual Anthology Collective (Parry, 1995) have all produced auto-ethnographical accounts of bisexuality whilst Angelides (2001), Wolff (1979) and Cantarella (2002) have written on bisexual history. Collections of academic essays on bisexuality include Alexander & D'Onofrio (2014), M. Storr (2013) and Atkins (2013). Political works include Shiri Eisner's *Bi Notes for a Bisexual Revolution* (Eisner, 2013) while Kinsey (1948), F Klein (1978), Weinberg, Williams & Pryor (1994) and Anderson & McCormack (2016) amongst others have conducted specifically bisexual sexological research. While all these publications certainly inform the bi-theological debate, they do not seek to reconcile spirituality with sexuality as a central premise and nor should they.

Whilst anthologies of spiritual writings on bisexuality exist in the US, such as the collection edited by Debra Kolodny (2000), or the writings of the late Elias Farajajé-Jones (1995), the only specifically bi Christian work of applied theology I have encountered is a church handbook recently published by the Religious Institute of the United States (Alford-Harkey & Haffner, 2014), tellingly titled *Bisexuality: Making the Invisible Visible in Faith Communities*. (Marie Alford-Harkey is interviewed by myself later in this thesis). The Unitarian Universalist Church USA boldly published a *Bisexual Curriculum* (2007) for raising bisexual awareness among lay people and clergy - the significance of which cannot be underestimated - though at twenty pages long, this is little more than a pamphlet.

In the UK, there are no books or anthologies published to the best of my knowledge which exclusively cover bisexuality and Christianity from a sociological/sociocultural perspective,

though Alex Toft, currently of Coventry University, wrote a doctoral thesis in 2011 entitled *Bisexual Christian Identity: A Sociological Exploration of the Life Stories of Female and Male Bisexual Christians*.<sup>63</sup> Toft has also published sociological articles on the subject, notably in Yip (Yip & Hunt, 2013) and in another collaborative work with Stephen Hunt (Toft & Hunt, 2009).

My research is thus unique in that it is written from the perspective of a wife and mother of Christian faith within a mixed orientation marriage and grounded in the views and perspectives of bisexual Christians from both the UK and US, lay and clergy, academic and non-academic.

### **3.1.1 Erasure by Others**

Bisexual erasure typically refers to acts perpetrated against, or attitudes held towards bisexual people by third parties, whether consciously or not, as a direct result of living in a monogamist, heterosexist culture (Anderson & McCormack, 2016).

As the name suggests, a heterosexist society is one where heterosexuality is portrayed as the norm, with any other forms of human sexuality being seen as inferior or 'other.' Within this dichotomous system of power relations, there is no room for dual attraction or gender fluidity – all sexual orientations are monosexual, preferably directed towards the opposite sex, but unfortunately sometimes towards the same sex. The heterosexist society is therefore also a monosexist one, with heterosexuality ruling over the perceived lesser form of sexuality, homosexuality. The heterosexist monosexist society has no space between the tick boxes for those who do not slot easily into these binary sexual categories. As Anderson & McCormack (2016) explain:

Heterosexism is particularly relevant to bisexuals because of its relationship with monosexism. Privileging heterosexuality as the *ideal* sexuality and deeming other sexualities as inferior sets up a binary of sexualities (2016: 58).

A monogamist society is one which champions sexual exclusiveness between partners and views polyamory as intrinsically wrong or disordered. Within societies structured around

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<sup>63</sup> Available at <http://eprints.nottingham.ac.uk/11925/>

heterosexist, monosexist and monogamist value systems, the bisexual person has no visible existence. Mario Mieli (1980) describes the monosexuality and 'educastration' of heterosexual ideology, which seeks to condition society along exclusively heterosexual lines. Carter Heyward (1984) speaks ironically of the pathologisation of the non-binary categorised individual:

... boundaries are necessary to the maintenance of the established social order; that in order to function 'normally' in this society, I had to be clear on what I was, category by category, what I was as distinct from what I was *not*... Such clarity about the lines that divide us enables us to develop strong egos and stable personalities and to become 'normal' individuals. Or so we are led to assume. A lack of clarity surely manifests itself in the disintegrated, pathological 'abnormal' self (1984: 34).

As Fritz Klein notes: 'The groups most vulnerable to such brands of ridicule are those without the cultural rights of the concept of what is or is not 'normal' (1993: 55).'

As with the zero sum sexual typology outlined in the previous chapter, where homosexuality is measured against heterosexuality to arrive at a 'sexuality score' for each individual with no recourse to bisexuality, bisexual people are erased within binary monosexist cultures, as they are subsumed within the 'other' category, which is labelled homosexual. This links in with Anderson & McCormack's (2016) theory of the one-time rule of homosexuality:

When people come out as bisexual, an overwhelmingly homophobic and monosexist culture has regularly insisted that they were gay... a 'one-time rule of homosexuality' (Anderson 2008) exists in homophobic cultures that sees any single same-sex experience as evidence of a gay identity. Here, even one same-sex sexual act is socially equated with a homosexual orientation, regardless of how many 'opposite-sex' sexual experiences one has (2016: 8).

These heterosexist, monosexist, monogamist structures deny bisexual people the space to stake a claim for their own existence, which is mirrored in historical attitudes towards bisexual people, casting doubt on the integrity of the identity.<sup>64</sup> Such denials of bisexual realities and the authenticity of the bisexual identity are dealt with under 3.2.2.

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<sup>64</sup> E.g. Bergler (Bergler, 1956): 'Bisexuality—a state that has no existence beyond the word itself is an out-and-out fraud... the theory claims that a man can be alternatively or concomitantly homo and heterosexual... Nobody can dance at two different weddings at the same time. These so-called bisexuals are really homosexuals with an occasional heterosexual excuse (1956: 80-81).'

An already dire situation is arguably worse for bisexual women, who face yet another layer of discrimination where the heterosexist, monosexist and monogamist society is also patriarchal, as is the case in most of the western world. The bisexual woman of faith is well and truly squeezed out of existence amid multiple intersectional identities in faith communities, where heterosexist patriarchal interpretations of Scripture abound in the liturgies and doctrines of the church (see Chapter 4).

### **3.1.2 Self-erasure**

Self-erasure or self-censorship is another reason why bisexuality is erased from public consciousness, though in this instance it is bisexual people themselves locking the closet from the inside.

There are a number of reasons why bisexual people may choose to keep their orientation secret, not least due to the adverse social conditions outlined above. There may be other sociological factors, such as the influence of the HIV/AIDs epidemic of the 1980s on bisexual disclosure (Anderson & McCormack, 2016; George, 1993). There may be further stigmas<sup>65</sup> attached to being bisexual, such as accusations of philandery or immorality – irrespective of whether or not the bisexual person is sexually or romantically intimate with one or more individuals, and this element is particular relevant in faith communities. Lack of a cohesive identity is another reason for the delayed ‘coming out’ of bisexual people compared to gays and lesbians, as Weinberg, Williams & Pryor demonstrate (1994). In addition, accusations of enjoying ‘heterosexual privilege’ are common (Alford-Harkey & Haffner, 2014; Anderson & McCormack, 2016) – the idea that bisexual people take advantage of their ‘straight side’ to keep their true sexuality or ‘gay side’ closeted. (This is, of course, a misnomer, as bisexual people are neither straight nor gay).

The process of coming out is also more complex for bisexual people when partners and children are involved (Anderson & McCormack, 2016; George, 1993; McLean, 2007; Watson,

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<sup>65</sup> Sociologist Ervin Goffman defines stigma as ‘an attribute that is deeply discrediting’ (cited in Weinberg 1994:187)

2014). This is of particular relevance to this research project, where the author herself and a large number of participants are married, some with dependents. It is often the case that bisexual people have to come out repeatedly to different family and friendship groups over a longer period of time, which can feel burdensome and serve as a disincentive (a Tom Daley style *You Tube* revelation<sup>66</sup> is a far riskier business where school age dependents are involved). In addition, the feelings of straight or gay spouses in mixed orientation marriages must be taken into account; it is not simply a matter of personal choice where dependents are involved - the bisexual person of faith is not only dealing with their own self-perception, but – justifiably or not - the identities of all them associated with them (Buxton, 2011). This adds considerable extra burden to the bisexual person with dependents, especially within a church context where adverse value judgements may be made and the family is to a certain extent vastly extended by the manifold spiritual relationships often forged in such emotionally charged environments.

In addition, the bisexual often has to come out to the lesbian and gay community as well as the straight community, which adds yet another layer of complexity not experienced by homosexual people (Barker, Richards, Jones, & Monro, 2011).

The lack of a bisexual community – whatever the causes and whoever is to blame, if anyone - has implications for the mental health of the bisexual person as they are almost forced to play a chameleon role:

The stigma of homosexual behavior in the heterosexual world and the equal intolerance for heterosexual behavior in the homosexual world have left most bisexuals feeling they have no choice but to pose as one or the other, in accordance with the values of whichever camp they are presently in. But the bisexual's need for community may be just as great as anyone else's (Klein 1993: 109).

The need for subterfuge is at the heart of bisexual burden: 'Having to lie, to conceal and not be completely what one is – even with close friends – is a black cloud hanging over the heads of many bisexuals (Klein 1993:125).'

### **3.1.3 Erasure via Sexual Identity Politics**

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<sup>66</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OJWJnoB9EKw>



Sexual identity politics have further led to bisexual erasure. As Brady & Schirato (2010) point out, the erasure of bisexuals was born of political expediency -a initially bisexuals were welcome, as evidenced in footage from the 1969 Stonewall Riots in New York. It was the requirement to solidify the lesbian and gay identity along essentialist lines, in order to lend authenticity to their argument for equal rights, that led to the suppression of the bisexual voice (Garber, 1995). The initial aims of the Gay Liberation Movement were indeed, in the words of Altman (1972), to reveal the 'essentially polymorphous and bisexual' core of human sexuality.<sup>67</sup>

Political feminism was replaced by revolutionary feminism in the late 70s and the political lesbian was born. Bisexuals were seen to be 'collaborating with the enemy' (George, 1993) as 'it was not sexual desire for or emotional commitment to women which gained women access to the lesbian fold; it was rejection of men (George 1993: 49).' This was the sentiment behind feminist Kate Millett's mauling at the hands of the press on admitting her bisexuality (George, 1993). The rejection of bisexuality as a viable identity during this epoch is highlighted in Adrienne Rich's 'lesbian continuum' of female intimacy, which entirely bypasses bisexuality as an option (Rich, 1980). I have myself been challenged by a feminist liberation theologian on whether what I was describing as bisexuality was in actual fact just a point on Rich's lesbian continuum. I have therefore experienced bisexual erasure first hand within my own academic career.

Whilst the Queer movement of the 80s and 90s set about deconstructing essentialist rhetoric (as outlined in Chapter 1), it did not reconstruct bisexual identity. Rather its silence on bisexuality cast aspersions on it as a valid identity and continued the trend of bisexual erasure (Callis, 2009). Pajor refers to the perception of bisexuals as 'the white trash of the gay world (Pajor, 2005).' As Raven Kaldera writes (Kolodny, 2000): 'We blur boundaries. We dance back and forth over drawn lines as if they didn't exist, enraging those who have staked their worldviews on the existence of these lines (2000:147).'

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<sup>67</sup> Cited in Brady & Schirato p.60

Klopovic (Kolodny, 2000) sums up the threat posed to lesbian and gay sexual identity politics by bisexuals:

I suggest that bisexuality is problematic for some because it violates boundaries. It is easier for straights to define gays as the 'other' and vice versa, for it allows for an 'us' and 'them' stance. The problem arises because bisexuality dissolves the concept of the 'other' – hence the discomfort on both sides of the fence. People rely on the concept of the 'other' in order to define and reinforce their personal and group identity. In itself, this is proper and necessary, for no one can exist apart from 'categories'. The real question is whether we, as persons and as groups, allow categories to be windows into the lives of 'other' and thus allow for relationship. Do we instead employ categories as a weapon against the 'other'? Too often, though, the category of bisexuality is a weapon used by straights and gays/lesbians (2000: 155).'

Denial as a defence mechanism would appear to be in operation, as to acknowledge bisexuality is to query the stability of hetero- or homosexual identities (Eadie, 1993; Yoshino, 2000).

Bisexuality is 'a sign of transgression, ambiguity and mutability' (Däumer, 1992) which cannot be allowed to threaten stable political identities. The results are 'discourses of normalisation' (Eadie, 1993) resulting in Goffman's 'spoiled identities'<sup>68</sup> – the 'irredeemably tainted identities, produced in the name of a world which might be easy, habitable, comfortable for some by excluding certain groups from legitimation, rights or power (Eadie, 1993).'<sup>69</sup>

### **3.1.4 Erasure via biphobia**

Biphobia, the irrational fear of bisexual people, further leads to erasure. It may be linked to generalized homophobia and heterosexual antipathy towards all that is 'other' – especially in times of heightened homophobia, where conservative attitudes to homosexuality has a correlative effect on perceptions of bisexuality (Anderson & McCormack, 2016),

Susan George (1993) provides a good summary of the misguided logic at the heart of biphobia:

Mainstream society often views homosexuals as sad victims who cannot help their sexual orientation, and therefore deserve compassion and understanding. Bisexuals, on the other hand, are presumed to have a choice and are therefore seen as wilfully

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<sup>68</sup> Cited in Eadie (1993)

<sup>69</sup> Eadie (1993) cited in Storr (2013)

refusing to conform. Heterosexual objections to bisexuality often centre on the idea of bisexuals as sex-obsessed: bisexual behavior implies non-monogamy, which is a threat to marriage, religion and the state. Desire for sex outside marriage is projected on to a sub-group so sexually voracious it will even go to bed with members of its own sex. In this way, the challenge of bisexuality as a genuine alternative is diminished (1993: 22).

Wilful non-monogamy is the accusation worryingly at the heart of the Church of England's 119 word summation of bisexuality (Church of England, 1991), as we see in *Chapter 4: Bisexuality & The Church*. Such sentiments also assume bisexuality is about physical sexual expression, as if bisexual people are 'only after one thing' compared to the more subtle nuances of hetero- and homosexual behaviours.

Yet biphobia is also expressed by the lesbian and gay community, where bisexuals may be seen to 'dilute' the innate sexuality argument and challenge the integrity of lesbian and gay identity politics, as outlined above. As I have already touched on, bisexual people may be perceived as enjoying heterosexual privilege, or put simply, seizing the advantages of being 'half-straight,' and concealing their 'gay side.' To a certain extent, bisexuals *are* able to exercise the right to appear 'straight' and access 'straight' lifestyles (Anderson & McCormack, 2016), which of course can be advantageous during periods of elevated homophobia. Yet the implication that bisexuals do not 'take one for the team,' again conflates bisexual identity within a hetero-/homosexual binary, where by playing straight, one is not being true to one's gay self. A bisexual person is neither straight nor gay so it is not possible to be loyal to one side or the other, whatever that looks like anyway.

This deliberate denial of bisexual identity – what F Klein terms the 'non-existence myth'<sup>70</sup> (F. Klein, 1993) - increases both the invisibility of bisexual people and the unlikelihood of them coming out at a later date. The bisexual person is therefore effectively dead as a psychosexual entity: 'To be a person is to have a sexual orientation, to have a sexual orientation is to be

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<sup>70</sup> Klein lists four strands of the 'non-existence' myth surrounding bisexuality, namely

1. A person is *either* straight *or* gay
2. There is no such entity as bisexuality
3. The bisexual is really a homosexual
4. Bisexuality is only a transition stage

either straight or gay. So if one refuses to be either straight or gay, one has no sexual orientation, therefore no real personhood (Lingwood, 2010).'<sup>71</sup>

Even a leading light in queer theory, Judith Butler, (Butler, 2004) has acknowledged that 'a liveable life does require various degrees of stability... a life for which no categories of identity exist is not a liveable life (2004: 8).'

### **3.1.5 Erasure via binary thought**

Anderson & McCormack's 'one-time rule' of homosexuality is another factor in bisexual erasure. This rule dictates that one act of homosexuality makes a man or woman homosexual, even if they have been as sexually active - or indeed more sexually active - with opposite sex partners. Rather like one-drop of Jewishness under the Nazi regime, this dynamic eternally locks the person within an identity vault not of their own making, often at great personal cost. As George (1993) writes:

Most books of progressive sexual theory still omit bisexuality completely and the fact that many people have feelings for and relationships with people of both sexes is obscured. Once a person is known to have same-sex relationships, he or she is labelled homosexual, which becomes an exclusive identity, irrespective of whether he or she has mixed-gender relationships as well (1993: 36).

There is clearly something threatening about fluid sexual identities to the ruling hegemony, as Garber encapsulates so well: 'Bisexuality undoes statistics, confounds dimorphism, creates a volatile sets of subjects who will not stay put in neat and stable categories (1995: 283).'

Catholic theologian Gareth Moore, cited in Stuart (Stuart, 1995), speaks of the strong link between sexual control and social control: 'Unless people are controlled, they are dangerous. These people whose sexual behavior is unorthodox are often for that reason held to be a danger to society (see Stuart 1995:185).'

### **3.1.6 Erasure via Flippancy (micro-aggressions)**

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<sup>71</sup> p.34

What I term ‘flippancy’ is the less pointed, but no less damaging way in which the integrity and reality of bisexual experience is challenged by ill-informed comments and playground ‘banter’.

- **Germinal Bisexuality**

‘Aren’t we all bisexual anyway?’ is a frequently expressed dismissive when bisexuality is raised as a topic, usually with reference to Freud’s theory of innate bisexuality outlined in **Appendix 6**. This is a misrepresentation of Freud in any case, as he described bisexuality as an immature stage on the way to heterosexual maturity (Freud, 1991). Whilst often well-meant, such comments uttered by outsiders deny bisexual people their ‘insider’ right to a bi-specific identity and bi-exclusive set of experiences.

- **Split loyalties**

‘Batting for both sides’ again erases bisexuality as a unique identity by inferring that the bisexual person is a treacherous infidel, simultaneously competing for the homosexual and heterosexual teams on the binary battle field. This again portrays bisexual people as ‘het-homos’ or ‘homo-hets’ rather than simply bisexual. As F Klein notes, with a nod to Robert Browning:

Somehow God seems more secure in his heaven if we are not burdened with the element of degree, when we are judging threatening behavior, especially sexual behavior... homosexuals or lesbians may have been despised for their ‘perversion,’ but their psychosexual existence has never been in question. The homosexual belongs. The lesbian belongs. He or she has a culture. He or she can be loyal to a team (1993: 10).

- **Psychosexual Spooks**

F Klein (1993) presents the common caricature of the immoral bisexual traitor:

The bisexual resembles the spy in that he or she moves psychosexually freely among men and among women. The bisexual also resembles the traitor in that he or she is in a position to know the secrets of both camps, and to play one against the other. The bisexual, in short, is seen as a dangerous person, not to be trusted, because his or her party loyalty, so to speak, is non-existent. And if one lacks this sort of loyalty, one is so far outside the human sexual pale that one is virtually non-existent (1993: 9).

Aside from the rather paranoid overtones of such sentiments, a form of personality erasure is also taking place here, where all bisexual people are portrayed as extrovert social butterflies, Myers-Briggs 'E' types who derive their energy from those around them (Briggs).<sup>72</sup> This of course contradicts assertions made elsewhere that bisexual people are psychologically disturbed, mentally instable 'closet dwellers' living a shadowy existence of self-denial in the home and workplace.

- **The Pendulum Effect**

Along similar lines is the notion that bisexual people<sup>73</sup> 'swing both ways', inferring a pendulous and reckless veering between heterosexual and homosexual intimacy that casts aspersions on both the integrity of the bisexual identity and the psycho-sexual stability of the perpetrator. Such cultural reference points are universal. Sittitrai et al (Sittitrai, Brown, & Virulrak, 1991) found that Thailand historically called bisexual people *chob tang song yang*, which translates as 'liking it both ways.' The term 'sua bi' - or fierce bisexual thief - also exists, carrying overtones of Klein's bisexual spy mentioned above.

- **Fence Sitters**

The idea that bisexual people 'haven't made their minds up' also assumes a sexual binary, where people are either homosexual or heterosexual and must come down from the fence and settle for one side or the other.

- **Unfussy eaters**

'You're just greedy' (discussed in 3.2.1) again denies the validity of bisexual identity, suggesting that bisexual people are just over-sexed individuals whose need for sexual activity over-rides the gender and/or genitalia of the object of desire.

These insensitive and flippant comments not only challenge the veracity of bisexual experience - they also serve as an added disincentive for bisexual people to be open about their sexuality.

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<sup>72</sup> Generally cited as appearing in 1977.

### 3.1.7 Erasure in the media

A 2012 report commissioned by the BBC to look into the portrayal of LGB people in film and television found that LGB were indeed under-represented in television and radio broadcasting (BBC, 2012). However, bisexual identities were conflated within the lesbian and gay category (whilst some distinction was made between lesbians and gay men), so it is impossible to assess figures for specifically bi erasure in TV and radio. The BBC does seem to have some awareness of bisexual issues though. Mohit Bakaya, Commissioning Editor for Radio 4 and Radio 4 Extra comments:

Radio 4 has a fairly good record on LGB representation and portrayal, but the finding that bisexuality was under-represented as an identity resonated with me. As a result, I commissioned *It's My Story: Getting Bi*, a documentary in which musician Tom Robinson explores what it is to be bisexual in Britain today (2012: 11)

As Fritz Klein notes: 'With rare exceptions... the bisexual in action, when portrayed at all, is seen negatively (1993:152).' Bisexual characters in movies are generally portrayed as morally deficient in some way. We see this in the murderous characters of Catherine Tramell (Sharon Stone) in *Basic Instinct* (1992) or more recently, punk bisexual computer hack, Lisbeth Salander (Noomi Rapace/Rooney Mara), in the Stieg Larsson trilogy of films.<sup>74</sup>

### 3.1.8 Erasure via Cultural Appropriation

Another form of bisexual erasure closely linked to the entertainment industry is cultural appropriation, a form of identity theft which regularly sees bisexual people 'appropriated' (usually) for the homosexual cause.

A recent example of this would be the media frenzy that followed British Olympic diver Tom Daley's announcement that he was bisexual via *You Tube* in December 2013. Despite speaking of liking 'guys and girls', it was immediately reported on Twitter amongst other places that Daley was 'gay' (Anderson & McCormack, 2016). Tennis legend Martina Navratilova is perhaps

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<sup>74</sup> Namely, *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, *The Girl Who Played with Fire* and *The Girl Who Kicked the Hornet's Nest*

the most famous 'lesbian' in sport of all time, but is a self-proclaimed bisexual: 'I'm not a one-sex person.'<sup>75</sup>

This practice of redeeming bisexual people for the homosexual cause is widespread. From the championing of Oscar Wilde (married to Constance Lloyd) to the 'theft' of King David in the Bible (has a child with Bathsheba), it appears that no historical or celebrity figures are safe from the clutches of homosexual 'glory seekers.'

The reverse is also true: one hundred and twenty-six of Shakespeare's sonnets refer to the 'Fair Lord' or 'Fair Youth', indicating bisexuality or homosexuality.<sup>76</sup> Yet our children are generally taught about Shakespeare's marriage to Anne Hathaway and study the great love scenes from *Romeo and Juliet* and *Hamlet*. In this example, potential bisexual icons are heterosexualised, not homosexualised, according to socio-cultural agendas.

### **3.1.9 Erasure via Objectification**

Another form of bisexual erasure which is particularly endemic within ecclesiastical writings is the objectification of bisexual people, that is, referring to bisexuals often in derogatory terms with no lived experience of what it is to live within this intersectional identity or without involving bisexuals in discourses about them.

Stephen Lingwood (2010) speaks of 'us' and 'them' theologies, written about bisexual people by non-bisexual people. Margaret Farley (2006) describes the objectification of sexual minorities, the 'experience of being put in a box, one's meaning and value determined without appeal, one's supposed self-unity cancelled (2006: 121).'

### **3.1.10 Erasure of Gender Difference**

Finally, erasure of gender difference takes place when bisexuals are objectified by others. As covered in Chapter 2: *Bisexuality in Science*, there is plenty evidence to suggest that bisexual

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<sup>75</sup> See <http://www.azquotes.com/quote/1157615>

<sup>76</sup> See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sexuality\\_of\\_William\\_Shakespeare](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sexuality_of_William_Shakespeare)



men tend more towards sexual activity that is often anonymous in nature than bisexual women, who seek intimacy from an already existing friendship which may or may not result in climax (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1977; Gooß, 2008; Weinberg, 1994). However, bisexuals are generally referred to as one homogenous group, with no distinction between the male and female variety - a form of erasure within an already erased category, a double negative. This is the equivalent of amalgamating male and female homosexualities into the 'gaybian' or the 'lesgay' for expedience sake, which of course does not happen (though the unfortunate lesbigay occasionally makes an appearance in older LGBT publications).

### **3.2 Bisexuality as a 'Sin'**

Eadie (1993) summarises the list of 'sins' commonly assigned to bisexual people by straights and gays alike in the following terms:

... if you get involved with them they convert you; they always leave you for a partner of the other sex; they drain the vital energies of gay politics; they are an HIV risk; they are psychologically unstable (1993: 130).'

Some of these 'sins' are outlined below.

- **Bisexuals as Sexual Gluttons**

Perhaps the most common 'sin' assigned to bisexual people is the sin of gluttony, specifically with reference to sex (Anderson & McCormack, 2016; Garber, 1995; George, 1993; F. Klein, 1993).

Whilst gays and lesbians have been able to distance themselves from the term homosexual, and afforded an identifier that separates sexual activity from orientation, the bisexual is irrevocably linked to sexual activity by virtue of the terminology assigned him or her. As bisexual tennis player Martina Navratilova famously commented: 'I hate the term

bisexual. It sounds creepy to me, and I don't think I'm creepy. There are times when I feel downright romantic.'<sup>77</sup>

Alternatives to bisexual such as bi-intimate or Blumstein & Schwartz's 'erotically malleable' (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1977) have failed to catch on, whilst Freud's 'ambisexual' is hardly an improvement (Freud, 1991). The genital-centric reputation of bisexual people is not aided by the terminology. It is therefore not surprising that stereotypes of the sexually insatiable dual attracted bisexual prevail. In 1983, the Gay Community News infamously printed a cartoon advertising 'Bisexuality Insurance' to protect lesbians and gays from bisexual lovers (Hutchins, 1999).

However, recently held personal discussions with both the Bisexual Resource Centre in Boston and with bisexual activist, Robyn Ochs, indicate that the term 'bi-plus' or bi+ as a means of symbolising so called 'middle sexual identities'<sup>78</sup> is catching on, alongside trans\* to cover the range of transgender/transsexual identities.

- **Bisexuals as Cowards & Compulsive Liars**

Accusations of moral cowardice and inauthenticity abound in popular stereotypes of bisexual people and such stereotyping is covered by a number of leading academics (Anderson & McCormack, 2016; Stuart, 1995; Weinberg, 1994). This stereotyping is just as prevalent within the gay and lesbian community as within the straight one. Stuart (1995) writes:

Lesbian and gay people can be particularly scathing in their dismissal of bisexual people as 'wanting to have their cake and eat it', portraying them often as moral cowards who identify with heterosexuals when the going gets rough for the lesbian and gay community. In hetero-reality bisexuals, when their existence is acknowledged, are often portrayed at worst as complete moral degenerates or at best people who are heterosexual really but also have an eccentric habit of being attracted to the same sex (1995:179).

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<sup>77</sup> See <http://www.azquotes.com/quote/1157615>

<sup>78</sup> Middle sexual identities refers to the panoply of sexual typologies between the homo-/heterosexual dyad, including gender fluid, a-gender and pansexual among others.

Weinberg, Williams & Pryor's (1994) study of bisexuality confirms this attitude on the part of gays and lesbians towards bisexuals:

Both gays and lesbians claimed that those who adopted the label 'bisexual' did so because they feared the stigma attached to defining themselves as 'gay' or 'lesbian.' Additionally, gays and lesbians saw bisexuality as a transition to becoming homosexual. In other words, they often rejected the bisexual identity in and of itself. Such attacks were said to come especially from politically active homosexuals who deplored the political fragmentation they saw caused by bisexuals who refused to fight the common enemy of 'heterosexism.' Bisexuals could exercise 'heterosexual privilege' – i.e., they could always revert to a comfortable identity rather than suffer the consequences of standing up for their gay rights (1994:117).

This horizontal oppression is a factor repeatedly mentioned in other accounts of bisexual experience.

- **Bisexuals as Disease Carriers**

Bisexual people have also been scapegoated for the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, particularly the HIV/AIDS virus in the 80s (George, 1993) yet also more recently (RHO, 2015; SFHRC, 2011a). Yet as Anderson & McCormack (2016) note, such claims are not backed up by statistics. Kahn et al (1997) found that just 1% of HIV infection was spread from bisexual men to women annually at the height of the crisis (Kahn, Gurvey, Pollack, Binson, & Catania, 1997).

- **Bisexuals as Traitors**

As has been highlighted in previous sections, gay sexual politics and particularly the radical feminism of the 1970s saw bisexuals viewed as traitors (George, 1993; F. Klein, 1993). Rodriguez et al describe bisexual woman being stigmatized in the lesbian community of the 70s and 80s owing to 'their occasional and pseudo-treasonous attraction to men (Rodriguez, Lytle, & Vaughan, 2013).'<sup>79</sup>

- **Bisexuals as Neurotic**

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<sup>79</sup> p.287

As well as the non-existence myth mentioned earlier, F Klein also outlines the myth of the neurotic bisexual (F. Klein, 1993):

*Table 3.1 The Neurotic Bisexual Myth*

Neurotic Myth
1. The bisexual is by definition neurotic
2. The bisexual cannot love deeply
3. The bisexual is mixed up and can't make up his/her mind
4. The bisexual is hyper sexed and sex crazy (1993: 169)

Source: Klein (1993)

We see these traits clearly portrayed in the Hollywood films mentioned earlier under 3.1.7 Erasure in the Media. Susan George (1993) backs up Klein's findings and speaks of the stereotypical 'hypersexual, uncommitted, immoral, confused' bisexual person (1993: 2). Or, as I term it in my own presentation papers on bisexuality: 'mucky, murderous & mentally unstable.'

To summarise, a range of undesirable behaviours and attitudes are assigned to bisexual people, largely as a result of ignorance and the in-built defence mechanisms of hegemonies under threat.

For Patrick Cheng (2011), the true sin is not bisexuality itself, but essentialist or empiricist discourses, which queer theology feels morally obliged to debunk:

... sin can be understood by queer theology to be sexual and gender essentialism... whenever we understand sexuality and gender identity to be fixed and unchangeable... we commit the sin of essentialism by failing to recognize the constructed nature of these categories. ... by contrast, whenever we challenge the essentialist nature of these categories, we experience the grace of constructivism (2011:74).

### **3.3 Bisexuality & Mental Health**

One stand-out reason why bisexual invisibility and erasure should be taken seriously is the growing awareness that bisexual people, and particularly black, Asian and minority ethnicity (BAME) bisexual people<sup>80</sup>, are at elevated risk of suicide and mental health issues: ‘The multiple forms of cultural burden that bisexuals experience as a result of the overlapping and intersecting bias towards them may have a profound impact on their psychological wellbeing (Anderson & McCormack 2016: 68).’

The stigmatization faced by bisexual people has been shown to have an adverse effect on their mental health and this section highlights some of the medical and sociological findings that support this position.

Writing in 1978, Fritz Klein remarked:

We tend to categorise people, to put them into the most readily available group. In the worlds of commerce, government, and religion, this is to some degree logical. That this mistaken practice is also adopted by the individual in his or her search for self-identity – and held onto at all costs for lack of a suitable alternative – is tragic (1993: 5).

What is known as ‘minority stress theory’ (Meyer & Wilson, 2009) accounts for high levels of chronic stress in bisexual individuals owing to the mass stigmatization they encounter. This section looks at some of the personal tragedies faced by bisexual people going about their everyday life. As there is a multiplicity of surveys on LGBT mental health, I have simply chosen a key selection from the last couple of decades from North America and the UK which focus specifically on bisexuality. Mental health and suicide statistics for bisexual people of faith are unavailable, as far as can be discerned.

The result of **Weinberg, Williams & Pryor**’s survey of bisexual people in the US (1994) found a ‘lack of social validation and support that came with being a self-identified bisexual (1994: 34).’ Lesbians and gays viewed bisexuals as confused and bisexuality as a pathological state, which in turn becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy as bisexuals live in a state of ‘continued uncertainty’ (1994: 37).

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<sup>80</sup> Miller et al (2007) quoted in SFHRC (SFHRC, 2011a) p.15: ‘... it is well documented that people of color have challenges around healthcare access, delivery, and experience that white people do not typically face... this combination of race/ethnicity and bisexuality creates a particular interaction effect, which in turn further implicated health and healthcare.’

An article that appeared in the *British Journal of Psychiatry* in 2002 found that bisexual people reported poorer mental health than any other sexual orientation in the sample survey (**Jorm, Korten, Rodgers, Jacomb, & Christensen, 2002**):

The bisexual group was highest on measures of anxiety, depression and negative affect, with the homosexual group falling between the other two groups... The bisexual group had the worst mental health (2002: 423).

The results of the **Stonewall Survey of Bisexual Health** (2007) were collated by Colledge et al. in the Journal of Public Health (**Colledge, Hickson, Reid, & Weatherburn, 2015**) and revealed that:

As a group, bisexual women were younger, poorer, and more likely to be trans-identified, minority ethnic identified and to use marijuana, compared with lesbians. Bisexuals were more likely than lesbians to report eating problems, self-harm, depressed feelings and anxiety. Fewer bisexual women attended lesbian or bisexual social events, were 'out', or had experienced any sexuality-related discrimination, compared with lesbians. More bisexual women reported poor mental health or psychological distress than did lesbians. Bisexual women may be more likely to experience stress due to the 'double discrimination' of homophobia and biphobia. This stress, experienced mainly as internalized and felt stigma, could result in a greater risk for poor mental health compared with lesbians. Addressing both biphobia and homophobia within UK society has important preventative health implications(2015: 1)

The Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (**BRFSS 2005-2010**) data taken from seven US states between 2005 and 2010 found that bisexual men and women reported worse health than homosexual and heterosexual people (Anderson & McCormack, 2016). Another BRFSS study from Washington State based on data collected from telephone calls between 2003 and 2007 found alarming discrepancies between bisexual women and lesbian, as well as similarities:

- Bisexual women had significantly lower levels of education, were more likely to be living with income below 200% of the federal poverty level, and had more children living in the household.
- Bisexual women were significantly less likely to have health insurance coverage and more likely to experience financial barriers to receiving healthcare services.

- Bisexual women were more likely to be current smokers and acute drinkers.
- Bisexual women showed significantly higher rates of poor general health and frequent mental distress, even after controlling for confounding variables.

(Reproduced from San Francisco Human Rights Commission LGBT Advisory Committee Report: *Bisexual Invisibility: Impacts and Recommendations*) (2011: 12)

Figures from the **Canadian Community Health Survey** (2010) show that nearly half of bisexual women and over a third of bisexual men had seriously considered or attempted suicide, compared to just 9.6% of heterosexual women and 7.4% of heterosexual men. It was noted that bisexual men were 6.3 times more likely to report lifetime suicidality than heterosexual men and bisexual women 5.9 times more likely than heterosexual women (D. J. Brennan, Ross, Dobinson, Veldhuizen, & Steele, 2010).

The findings are outlined in the table below:

*Table 3.2: Suicidality among LGB men and women in Canada, 2010*

Sexual Orientation	Suicidality Among Women		Suicidality Among Men	
	Percentage	Adjusted rate (Compared to heterosexual)	Percentage	Adjusted rate (Compared to heterosexual)
Bisexual	45.40%	5.9	34.80%	6.3
Lesbian/Gay	29.50%	3.5	25.20%	4.1
Homosexual	9.60%	-	7.40%	-

Source: San Francisco Human Rights Commission, *Bisexual Invisibility: Impacts & Recommendations* (SFHRC, 2011a)

**C Lynn Carr's 2011** study focused on bisexual women's health as revealed by studying the titles of academic papers relating to bisexuality, using the Social Sciences Citation Index published by Thomas Reuters (Carr, 2011). Carr discovered higher levels of alcoholism and heavy episodic drinking (HED) among bisexual women compared to lesbian and straight women and higher incidence of drug abuse in bisexual female adolescents in the US than among straights and gays. Carr also uncovered links between discrimination and mental health problems.

**The Pew Poll of 2013** of LGBT Americans (Taylor, 2013) in the US found considerably less bisexual men and women were 'out' to family, friends and colleagues than lesbians and gays. Bisexual men are far less likely than gay men or bisexual women to socialize with other sexual minorities. Lack of acceptance was cited as the primary reason why bisexuals opted not to disclose their sexual orientation. However, the report also found that many bisexual people did not feel the same need to announce their sexual identity as their gay peers. This sizable report can be freely accessed online<sup>81</sup> for a further breakdown of figures.

### 3.4 Conclusion

To conclude, bisexual people carry a large degree of social stigma, or burden, broadly via a twofold process of identity erasure (reductive) and identity degradation (prescriptive). In this way, bisexual identity is either ignored or prescribed by third parties. Through the multifaceted process of bisexual erasure, bisexual people are denied the platform to define and promote their own identities; the definitional void is then filled by degrading or flippant remarks by third party individuals/stakeholders.

Many of the issues faced by bisexual people, such as erasure, vilification and objectification, are compounded within religious organisations. The unique situation of the bisexual Christian both within straight and LGBT faith communities will be explored in the next chapter, *Bisexuality & the Church*. The concept of 'burden' is particularly resonant within the Christian faith, in the light of Christ's invitation to the weary and stressed:

Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light (Matthew 11: 28-30, New Revised Standard Version).

Some of the burdens of being bisexual and Christian will feature in the next chapter; some suggestions for alleviating these burdens are proposed in the conclusion to this research project.

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<sup>81</sup> See [http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/files/2013/06/SDT\\_LGBT-Americans\\_06-2013.pdf](http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/files/2013/06/SDT_LGBT-Americans_06-2013.pdf)



## CHAPTER 4

### Bisexuality & The Church

This chapter takes us to the heart of this research project, namely, how bisexuality is perceived and handled or mishandled by the Western Christian Church. It deals with the silence surrounding the subject of bisexuality within the mainstream Christian denominations and seeks to explore the conditions that have given rise to this dialogical vacuum. I have focused specifically on the UK, but experiences and contributions from the USA also feature as both informative to the UK situation and in preparation for the qualitative research project to follow, in which congregants and pastors from both countries are interviewed to provide comparative data. This 'lived experience' data is key in the construction of a holistic identity for bisexual Christians, as per the criteria for constructing sexual ethics outlined in the Introduction to this project.

It is untenable to consider what a holistic identity might look like for a bisexual person of faith without considering what the doctrines and liturgies of their faith have to say about human sexuality, as based on denominational interpretations of Scripture. For this reason, I begin this chapter with a brief summary of the so-called 'texts of terror' or 'clobber passages' from the Bible, traditionally used to maintain a conservative fundamentalist position against same-sex attracted individuals. There is not room here to go into the various translational anomalies and contextual peculiarities of each text; this has been widely covered by both academic theologians (Countryman, 1989; Helminiak, 1994; Rogers, 2009; Sharpe, 2011; Thatcher, 1993) and mainstream Christian writers (Chalke, 2013; Lee, 2012; Miner, 2002; O'Keefe, 2011; Shore, 2011; Sphero, 2012) and is very much well-farrowed ground. Furthermore, I am in agreement with Tim Koch's 2001 statement that gay male theologians fighting over the exact meaning of biblical texts is little more than a 'pissing contest' (Koch, 2001) and all too often misses the larger point – that Christ upheld the oppressed, espoused love and justice, and stood against Pharisaical legalism. Jesus is against patriarchy and status (Cahill, 1989). In the words of Udis-Kessler (Kolodny, 2000): 'Jesus was not merely a teacher, preacher, healer and prophet; he was

also, and centrally, a shatterer of boundaries, destroyer of margins, and dismantler of statuses in the name of God's boundless, all-inclusive love<sup>82</sup> (2000: 12)

All the same, it is necessary – to provide a framework of reference at the very least – to list the passages in question and to cite the common arguments for and against a literal interpretation of the so-called ‘terror texts.’

#### 4.1 The Biblical ‘Texts of Terror’

Whilst there are commonly held to be seven direct references to homosexuality (see **Table 4.1**) in the Bible and it is these texts that are commonly seized by anti-gay biblical exegetists, I believe that there are actually ten texts which could be **seen** to refer to same-sex activity. However, since the term homosexual only came into being in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (see **Appendix 6**), it is somewhat nebulous and anachronistic to focus on texts on the basis of terminological incidence in any case.

It is perhaps necessary at this juncture to clarify my own position on the fallibility of Scripture. It is my personal view – and I bring to the table my own academic and professional background as a linguist, translator and transcriber - that given the cultural context in which these scriptures were written, let alone the various linguistic and translational mutations throughout history, we stand on very shaky ground indeed in attempting to deduce absolute truths from these texts on such a complex matter as human sexuality (Countryman, 1989; Lings, 2013). That said, since such passages of scripture are routinely seized by fundamentalists to rail against LGBT people, we would do well to put them in the cultural context of their time.

K Renato Lings’ weighty tome on interpretative anomalies within the same-sex Scriptures, *Love Lost in Translation: Homosexuality and the Bible* - at 786 pages long - suggests just some of the complexities involved in extracting the true meaning from texts written centuries ago in vastly different cultural landscapes, which have been translated in a multitude of ways from non-primary sources (Lings, 2013).

A summary of these ten passages is provided in **Appendix 7**.

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<sup>82</sup> From *The Holy Leper and the Bisexual Christian* in Kolodny (2000)

**Appendix 8** gives a detailed cross translation comparison of each scripture using the conservative evangelical *New International Version* of the Bible (Zondervan, 2002), the more liberal *New Revised Standard Version* (Barton & Spriggs, 1989) and Eugene Peterson’s everyday paraphrase *The Message* (Peterson, 2014).

The table below lists these seven so-called ‘texts of terror’ or ‘clobber passages’ typically used by fundamentalist/conservative evangelical Christians to deny support to LGBT people. This table, reproduced with the kind permission of [www.religioustolerance.org](http://www.religioustolerance.org), an Ontario based consultancy for religious tolerance, gives an overview of the standard interpretation of the most common Scriptures used to discuss same-sex attraction in the Church, from both a fundamentalist and progressive position. (Please refer to **Appendix 7** and **Appendix 8** to read the actual bible quotes, as it does not reproduce the Scriptural passages). The strength and integrity of this particular table lies in the ecumenical basis of the organisation, which is not affiliated to a particular denomination, but seeks to reach consensus on disputatious areas of theology via multi-faith direction and scholarship.

The table overleaf demonstrates the potential differences in interpretation when these passages are placed in the cultural context of the time, where hospitality and purity laws were literally written in stone and pagan temple rituals had infiltrated the fledgling Christian communities in today’s Italy, Greece and Turkey. There was, as we can see, no concept of sexual orientation or loving homosexual relationships, simply sexual acts that were acceptable or not acceptable for people of God in the context of the culture at that time.

Thus it can be seen that there is a spectrum of interpretations of the salient passages of Scripture on homosexuality, from contextual readings of the Bible by the liberal left wing of the global church, to literal readings from the fundamentalist right.

Table 4.1: The 'Clobber Passages'

Location	Typical interpretation by religious conservatives	Typical interpretation by religious progressives & secularists
Genesis 19	Condemns all same-sex sexual behaviour, whether by two men, two women, within a loving committed relationship or a 'one-night stand.'	Condemns anal raping of strangers for the purpose of humiliation.
Leviticus 18:22	Condemns all same-sex sexual behaviour.	Condemns gay ritual sex in a Pagan temple and/or males having sex in a woman's bed.
Leviticus 20:13	Condemns all same-sex sexual behaviour.	Condemns gay ritual sex in a temple and/or males having sex in a woman's bed.
Romans 1:26-27	Condemns all homosexual behaviour as unnatural.	Describes a group of heterosexuals who, against their basic nature, engage in same-sex behaviour during ritual orgies.
1 Corinthians 6:9-10	Sexually active homosexuals will go to hell, not heaven, at death. Once truly saved, homosexuals will become heterosexuals.	Male child molesters and the children they molest will go to Hell, not Heaven, at death.
1 Timothy 1:9-10	Condemns all same-sex sexual behaviour.	Refers to child molesters and the children they molest.
Jude 1:7	Sexually active homosexuals will go to hell, not heaven, at death.	Humans who have sex with other species -- angels in this case -- will go to Hell, not Heaven, at death.

Reproduced by kind permission of [www.religioustolerance.org](http://www.religioustolerance.org)

## 4.2 A Survey of Literature on Bisexuality per Denomination

Whilst all the mainstream churches in the US and UK include copious position statements on homosexuality and same-sex marriage, which are readily available online, my focus is on bisexuality. Therefore, the next section considers what the church has to say about bisexuality by denomination. These findings are based on the official literature produced by the churches in question and not on the statements or publications of splinter groups or individuals, affiliated or otherwise. For brevity's sake, I have elected to restrict this section to mainstream

denominations in the UK, though a background to US churchmanship is provided in **Appendix 9**.

#### **4.2.1 Bisexuality in the Anglican Church (Church of England)**

In 1991, the Anglican Church published a document entitled *Issues in Human Sexuality* (Church of England, 1991). This guideline paper contained a statement by the House of Bishops on several aspects of sexual behaviour and was commended by the General Synod for wider discussion within the Church of England. Mandatory reading for all candidates for lay or licensed ministry within the Church of England, *Issues* attempted to locate the highly divisive subject of homosexuality within a larger debate on human sexuality. This forty-eight page publication devoted over a third of its contents, seventeen pages, to *The Phenomenon of Homosexual Love*. Yet so dismissive was the Church of England of the bisexual experience, that bisexuality merited just ten lines (119 words) within these seventeen pages, under Point 5.8:

We recognise that there are those whose sexual orientation is ambiguous, and who can find themselves attracted to partners of either sex. Nevertheless it is clear that bisexual activity must always be wrong for this reason, if for no other, that it inevitably involves being unfaithful. The Church's guidance to bisexual Christians is that if they are capable of heterophile relationships and of satisfaction within them, they should follow the way of holiness in either celibacy or abstinence or heterosexual marriage. In the situation of the bisexual it can also be that counselling will help the person concerned to discover the truth of their personality and to achieve a degree of inner healing (1991: 42)

Bisexual activity, the Anglican Church confidently asserted within these ten lines, is always wrong because it entails infidelity as a matter of course (a highly presumptuous statement that would seem to suggest that all forms of bisexual expression involve genital relations or other acts of perceived unfaithfulness. Nowhere is heterosexual behaviour so narrowly categorised nor so stringently prescribed). The bisexual person is simplistically advised to follow the *way of holiness*, with this *via sanctitatis* defined as heterosexual marriage or celibacy. Failing that, he or she should seek counselling to resolve potential personality disorders.

Paragraph 5.8 in question justifiably came in for some severe criticism, a point conceded by the Church of England itself in the follow up debate (Church of England, 2003). The Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement (LGCM) described 5.8 as 'insensitive, ignorant, simplistic and

inconsistent.<sup>83</sup> The 300+ page post-debate publication *Some Issues in Human Sexuality* (2003), quotes theologian Adrian Thatcher's views on the contentious implication within *Issues* that bisexual people are sick and in need of healing (Church of England, 2003). Again with reference to Paragraph 5.8, Thatcher questions the stark choice offered to bisexual Christians of monogamous marriage, celibacy or bust and challenges the validity of approaching the bisexual experience through a heterosexist lens: 'The stark choice between celibacy or heterosexual marriage places it within a framework that knows nothing of bisexuality and cannot cope with it (Thatcher, 1993).'<sup>84</sup>

However, it was not just the sheer lack of insight and compassion into the bisexual condition that made Paragraph 5.8 so controversial, but the brevity of the summation and the ambivalence towards the subject. Whilst the follow-up debate paid lip-service to the objections of liberal theologians to paragraph 5.8, *Some Issues* remained adamant that bisexual people are governed by the same sexual ethic as their heterosexual counterparts and that the bisexual person of faith should aspire to a life of heterosexual monogamy or celibacy. There remained a callous indifference to the spiritual health of the bisexual: 'from the standpoint of traditional Christian ethics, bisexual people do not come into a separate ethical category of their own' (Paragraph 8.5.6) and few concessions made to those with so-called *unusual sexual desires* (2003:213).

Despite the extended coverage given to bisexuality in *Some Issues*, the silence in the Church of England concerning bisexual people and their complex pastoral needs - in a climate where homosexuality is very much on the agenda - remains deafening.

#### **4.2.2 Bisexuality in the Methodist Church**

The Methodist Church - while in some senses the most progressive of the main denominations on inclusivity issues, particularly same-sex marriage - remains largely silent on bisexuality, stating in its 1993 *Resolutions* (still operational) that the Church: '...recognises, affirms and celebrates the participation and ministry of lesbians and gay men in the church.'<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Press statement issued by the LGCM, 4 December 1991 quoted in Thatcher (1993), p.159

<sup>84</sup> p.156 of *Liberating Sex* (2003) is quoted in *Some Issues in Human Sexuality* (2003)

<sup>85</sup> See [http://outcomeonline.org.uk/?page\\_id=90](http://outcomeonline.org.uk/?page_id=90) (Outcome is the Methodist LGBT group)

It also states: 'Our shared ambition is to combat repression and discrimination, to work for justice and human rights and to give dignity and worth to people whatever their sexuality.'<sup>86</sup>

Justice and dignity does not appear to extend to acknowledging bisexuality, however. Whilst a 2014 official Methodist paper on homophobia alludes to 'LGB' Christians, again no mention is made specifically of bisexual people, though references to gays and lesbians abound. In not one of the seven actual case histories presented, which cite examples of homophobia in the church, is a bisexual person or incident mentioned. Either there are no bisexual Methodists (in a church with 200,000+ members), or bisexual Methodists are closeted, or biphobia does not take place in the Methodist Church.

'Outcome,' the LGBT branch of the Methodist Church, published a leaflet in March 2015 entitled *Our Vision for an Inclusive Methodist Church: Strategy 2015-2020*. This leaflet explains that 'LGBTQI is the umbrella term we use to refer to people who describe themselves as lesbian, gay, transgender, queer or intersex.' Bisexuality is omitted from the list – an unfortunate oversight that speaks volumes.

#### **4.2.3 Bisexuality in the Free (Evangelical) Church**

The majority of the UK's free evangelical churches are affiliated to one of two giant apostolic Christian ministries, Pioneer Church or New Frontiers International. Vineyard Christian Fellowship (VCF) is another large contemporary charismatic church founded in the US, with several churches around the UK, including locally in Southampton, Winchester and Portsmouth.

Neither Pioneer Church nor New Frontiers publish position papers on homo-/bisexuality on their websites, though at the time of writing, New Frontiers' site was under construction. VCF published a position paper in August 2014 entitled *Pastoring LGBT Persons*, yet no mention is made within this ninety page document of bisexual people. It concludes by reaffirming its core belief that heterosexual marriage is the only acceptable form of sexual relationship permissible to God's people.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> See <http://www.methodist.org.uk/who-we-are/views-of-the-church/human-sexuality>

<sup>87</sup> See [http://vineyardusa.org/site/files/PositionPaper-VineyardUSA-Pastoring\\_LGBT\\_Persons.pdf](http://vineyardusa.org/site/files/PositionPaper-VineyardUSA-Pastoring_LGBT_Persons.pdf)

However, the conservative evangelical position on bisexuality is summed up in popular fundamentalist biblical resource 'Got Questions.org.'<sup>88</sup>

*Table 4.2: Conservative Evangelical Position on Bisexuality*

**Question: "What does the Bible say about bisexuality? Is being a bisexual a sin?"**

**Answer:** The Bible nowhere directly mentions bisexuality. However, it is clear from the Bible's denunciations of homosexuality that bisexuality would also be considered sinful. Leviticus 18:22 declares having sexual relations with the same sex to be an abomination. Romans 1:26-27 condemns sexual relations between the same sex as abandoning what is natural. First Corinthians 6:9 states that homosexual offenders will not inherit the kingdom of God. These truths apply equally to bisexuals and to homosexuals. The Bible tells us that a person becomes bisexual or homosexual because of sin (Romans 1:24-27). This does not necessarily mean sins the person has committed. Rather, it refers to sin itself. Sin warps, twists, and perverts everything in creation. Bisexuality and homosexuality are caused by sin 'damaging' us spiritually, mentally, emotionally, and physically. Sin is the plague, and bisexuality is simply one of the symptoms.

This description would unfortunately seem to suggest that bisexual people are, like homosexuals, damaged and diseased and by suggestion in need of repair and restoration, rather like an infected hard drive.

#### **4.2.4 Bisexuality in the Quaker Movement**

The Quakers, or Religious Society of Friends, expressly mention bisexuality within their LGBT resources, including an explanation of the Ithaca Statement, which emerged from a 1972 Quaker conference in Ithaca, New York.<sup>89</sup>

The Ithaca Statement asks:

- 'Are Friends open to examining in our Meetings facets of sexuality, including bisexuality, with openness and loving understanding?
- 'Are Friends aware that Friends are suffering in our Meetings because they are not exclusively heterosexual? That Friends have felt oppressed and excluded, often without conscious intent; have felt inhibited from speaking Truth as they experience it? That Quaker institutions have threatened their employees with loss of jobs should their orientations become known?

<sup>88</sup> See <http://www.gotquestions.org/bisexual-bisexuality.html>

<sup>89</sup> See [http://qlgf.org.uk/?page\\_id=430](http://qlgf.org.uk/?page_id=430)



- 'Are Friends, with their long tradition of concern for social justice, aware of the massive and inescapable bigotry in this area directed and perpetuated by virtually all United States institutions, to wit: all branches of government; churches; schools; employers; landlords; medical, bar and other professional associations; insurance companies; news media; and countless others?
- 'Are Friends aware of their own tendency to falsely assume that any interest in the same sex necessarily indicates an exclusively homosexual orientation and to further falsely assume that interest in the opposite sex necessarily indicates an exclusively heterosexual orientation?'

Source: [www.qlgf.org.uk](http://www.qlgf.org.uk)

Writing on the fortieth anniversary of the Ithaca Statement in 2012, Grant Denkinson<sup>90</sup> notes: 'Questions on false assumptions, unconscious exclusion and openness to examining sexuality, including bisexuality, remain relevant.' This statement feels incredibly forward thinking for the time. Though over forty years old, it would seem that the Quakers in 1972 were more advanced in their thinking on human sexuality than most mainstream denominations are in 2016, forty-four years on.

#### **4.2.5 Bisexuality in the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC)**

The Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches is known as 'the gay church' due to its affirming attitude and large LGBT membership. Bisexual people are mentioned within its mission statements:

We are a church which tries to be especially welcoming of those people whom the historic church has persecuted and denied entrance: Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual people, women, ethnic and racial minorities, trans people, people with disabilities, people who are different from the majority in some way.<sup>91</sup>

#### **4.2.6 Bisexuality in the Church of Scotland**

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<sup>90</sup> See [www.qlgf.org.uk](http://www.qlgf.org.uk)

<sup>91</sup> See <http://mccnorthlondon.org.uk/aboutus/what-we-believe/>

In its lengthy General Assembly 2013 Blue Book, the Church of Scotland acknowledges within the Report of the Theological Commission on Same-Sex Relationships and the Ministry:

There is now a growing awareness that our sexuality is more complex than the simple assignment of categories would suggest. Rather than labelling people as 'gay' or 'straight' or 'bisexual,' it is more helpful to think of a broad spectrum of sexuality, on which each person has a place which is relatively firmly established from an early stage in life.<sup>92</sup>

While in some ways dismissive of the term bisexual, it is relatively progressive in its thinking compared to its fellow mainstream denominations, referring in its report to Kinsey's seven point scale and Gudorf's *The Erosion of Sexual Dimorphism* (Gudorf, 2001).

#### **4.2.7 Other Denominations**

In terms of **Roman Catholicism**, The Catechisms of the Catholic Church on Human Sexuality (2357 & 2358)<sup>93</sup> make no mention of bisexuality, though 'homosexual tendencies' are labelled 'objectively disordered' under 2358. No mention could be found of bisexuality on the human sexuality page of the official UK **Baptist Church** website.<sup>94</sup>

With regard to the **United Reformed Church** (URC), bisexuality is not mentioned in the Human Sexuality Task Force's *Towards a Theology of Same-Sex Relationships*<sup>95</sup> from September 2011. More recent online updates have focused on same-sex marriage legislation, which failed in June 2014. Whilst sensitively written, *Towards a Theology of Same-Sex Relationships* focuses entirely on gay and lesbian partnerships in the wider context of human sexuality and marriage.

#### **4.3 Bisexual Erasure in the Church**

In 1991, John Carey, Chair of the Special Committee on Human Sexuality within the Presbyterian Church USA, listed four contentious ethical issues deemed 'virtually impossible for the church to tackle (Kolodny, 2000)<sup>96</sup>. Top of the list was bisexuality. Yet, when it comes to

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<sup>92</sup> See [http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0017/13823/General\\_Assembly\\_2013\\_Blue\\_Book.pdf](http://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0017/13823/General_Assembly_2013_Blue_Book.pdf)

<sup>93</sup> See <http://www.mncc.org/catechism-of-the-catholic-church-on-marriage-sexuality-and-same-sex-attraction/>

<sup>94</sup> See [http://www.baptist.org.uk/Articles/369232/Fresh\\_Streams\\_sexuality.aspx](http://www.baptist.org.uk/Articles/369232/Fresh_Streams_sexuality.aspx)

<sup>95</sup> See [http://www.urc.org.uk/images/Human%20Sexuality/towards\\_a\\_theology\\_of\\_same-sex\\_relationships.pdf](http://www.urc.org.uk/images/Human%20Sexuality/towards_a_theology_of_same-sex_relationships.pdf)

<sup>96</sup> Cited on p.227 of Kolodny (2000). Sadly there is no reference to the other 'impossible' issues and all efforts to track this down have failed thusfar.

homosexuality, the same church has been 'garrulous.'<sup>97</sup> As Adrian Thatcher (1993) notes: 'Bisexual people are almost always overlooked in discussions of sexuality.' (1993:155). This dialogical silence on bisexuality appears to be a common trend within the mainstream western Christian church.

Several clergy friends have told me that the Church of England doesn't 'do' sex and sexuality. This was confirmed when I was exploring ordination in the Anglican Church in 2010, where I was told on no account to mention my (bi)sexuality. But does ignorance or middle-class discomfort with sexual ambiguity explain or justify the lack of rigorous theological and doctrinal dialogue on the subject of bisexuality? And if this is the case, then what makes homosexuality so much more palatable a subject for discussion?

This section considers bisexual erasure from an ecclesiastical and theological standpoint. Why is bisexuality not talked about at church and why do theologians studiously avoid the subject, for the most part? Does erasure take place along similar lines to secular bisexuality or is the phenomenon exacerbated in church environments? Is there diversification in the experiences of bisexual Christians compared to other categories of bisexual?

#### **4.3.1 Internalised Clerical Biphobia**

Gene Robinson, the first openly gay Bishop of New Hampshire, paints a picture of a Church riven and driven by fear (Robinson, 2008). It is this paranoia that accounts for the absence of dialogue on divisive issues of human sexuality.

Fear is a terrible thing. And there is a lot of it in the Anglican Communion right now. It is the opposite of faith. The truth is, the near absence of any real 'listening process' is an absence of faith and a capitulation to fear, not a defence of doctrinal purity (2008:145).

What is at the root of this fear? As discussed in Chapter 2: *Bisexuality in Science*, Kinsey's 1948 ground-breaking report on human sexuality found that 37% of American males had taken part in some homosexual activity, thereby making homosexuality/bisexuality far more prevalent than initially thought. Nevertheless, heterosexual activity is perceived as the norm to which

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<sup>97</sup> Carey quoted in Susan Halcomb Craig, "A Word We Cannot Yet Speak/A Word We Must Now Speak: Bisexuality and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)" in Kolodny (2000).

one should aspire. Thatcher (1993) explains homophobia (and by association, biphobia) as a reflex reaction by the avowed heterosexual to unwanted same-sex attraction:

The likely cause of homophobic attitudes among heterosexual people lie in most of us being neither predominantly heterosexual or homosexual in our orientation. We are nonetheless very strongly predisposed towards heterosexual sexual activity since it is proclaimed as normative in most modern societies (1993:72).

The heterosexual person is repelled by feelings of same-sex attraction, due to his or her social conditioning, and projects these negative feelings onto symbols of homosexuality, such as LGBT people.

Could it thus be that the House of Bishops and other clerics are operating from a basis of fear which has roots in its members' own latent bisexuality? If so, biphobia stems from a fear of personal sexual ambiguity which becomes externalised into blanket condemnation of bisexual 'activity' and an avoidance of dialogue on bisexuality.

#### **4.3.2 Bi-invisibility in Scripture**

One potential reason for the silence is the apparent absence of bisexuality in Scripture. Whilst male homosexuality is explicitly mentioned on seven occasions in the Bible<sup>98</sup> and lesbianism potentially alluded to in Paul's letter to the Romans<sup>99</sup>, there is no clear and obvious framework of reference within Scripture for the bisexual condition, beyond speculation on the sexuality of certain biblical figures. While it is possible to make a case for the bisexual credentials of David (significant relationships with both Bathsheba and Jonathan)<sup>100</sup> and Ruth (with Naomi and Boaz)<sup>101</sup>, such claims cannot achieve a status beyond supposition, by virtue of the sheer conceptual absence of bisexuality in the Bible. As theologians from all traditions grapple with the issues of homosexuality and gay marriage, bisexuality and mixed-orientation marriage remain almost entirely taboo. This is an issue within pro-gay biblical exegeses, as well, as we will see, where bisexuality is rarely mentioned beyond a nominal inclusion in the title. For example, Keith Sharpe's courageous 2011 publication *The Gay Gospels: Good News for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered People* (Sharpe, 2011) contains no ethical guidance for the

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<sup>98</sup> Genesis 19:5; Leviticus 18:21-22; Leviticus 20:13; Judges 19:22; Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; 1 Timothy 1:8-10

<sup>99</sup> Romans 1:26

<sup>100</sup> 2 Samuel 1:26 / 2 Samuel 11

<sup>101</sup> Ruth 1:16 / Ruth 4:13

Christian bisexual, despite the inclusion of bisexual people in the book's title. This is a common feature of LGBT affirming Christian books.

#### **4.3.3 Exegetical Erasure & Appropriation of Role Models**

The omission of bisexuality and potential bisexual role models in Scripture is consistent with the mass erasure of bisexual people from all manner of publications highlighted in Chapter 3: *Bisexuality as Burden*.

The concept of burden is particularly relevant in New Testament theology, given Jesus' invitation in Matthew 11:28: 'Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest (Barton & Spriggs, 1989).'

Whilst Christ himself is ready to carry our burdens and provide some respite from our troubles, he appears to be in the minority amongst Christians. Erasure from church policy documents is extended to bisexual omission within works of pro-gay biblical exegesis. Sharpe (2011) is not the only guilty party, with Shore-Goss et al. (2013) and Stuart (1997) also publishing volumes which contain bisexual in the title/sub-title with no actual bisexual content.

Appropriation of potential bisexual role-models is another issue, as in the secular LGBT world. King David from the Old Testament is regularly homosexualised on account of his intense friendship with Jonathan, e.g. Miner (2002), Sharpe (2011), Helminiak (1994), yet the unambiguous sexual desire David feels for a naked woman sunbathing on a roof terrace is conveniently ignored. Whilst the intense emotions between David and Jonathan could only possibly be homoerotic in nature, there is no doubting David's heterosexual impregnating of Bathsheba in 2 Samuel 11 following the roof terrace incident. From the biblical evidence I see before me, as a distinctly amateur theologian, David is at most bisexual and possibly just a straight man within a culture that historically honoured male friendship above marital companionship. Writing as a bisexual Christian myself, much as I would like biblical texts to abound with bi role models and affirming Scriptures, there is something disingenuous and unscholarly about (mis)appropriating texts for a political cause where there is surely a significant element of doubt.

There is a proliferation of pro-gay biblical exegeses that 'out' characters from Scripture as gay, such as Spong's convincing argument for an internally homophobic Apostle Paul (Spong, 1992) or Miner & Conoley's (Miner, 2002) presentation of the gay centurion from Matthew 8/Luke 7.

The lesbianisation of Ruth's relationship with her mother-in-law in the eponymous book of the Old Testament is much documented (Miner, 2002; Wilson, 1995), whilst Sharpe (2011) writes on the strange homoerotic practices of the prophet Elisha, who lays prostrate upon a young boy to raise him from the dead in 1 Kings 17:17-24.

Perhaps the most controversial homo-eroticizing of Scripture is found in studies of Jesus and the 'beloved disciple' John (see John 13:23) who reclines against Jesus and to whom Jesus leaves care of his family at the crucifixion. Theodore Jennings and Keith Sharpe have both written on the potential or probable homosexuality of Christ (Jennings, 2003; Sharpe, 2011). Whilst Jennings acknowledges the tenuousness of ascribing sexual orientations to characters from antiquity, he concludes *The Man Jesus Loved* as follows:

... we have seen that considerable evidence supports the view that Jesus' primary affectional relationship was with another man, one who is called in the Gospel of John 'the disciple Jesus loved.' Moreover we have seen that the reading of the references to this relationship that makes the most sense is one which infers a relationship of physical and emotional intimacy, a relationship that we might otherwise support would be the potential subject of erotic mediation, of sexual expression (2003: 233).

However, there is also a substantial body of theology that points to Jesus' close personal relationships with women in a time where this was culturally unacceptable, notably Mary Magdalene (Borland, 1991; Swindoll, 2011). So it would be equally valid to highlight Christ's close emotional attachments to the opposite sex. This is conveniently ignored. As Jennings himself points out:

While we have a number of sources for his life, they are all heavily determined by the theological interests of the writers and of the communities that transmitted these writings. Hence a great many things about Jesus' mission, ministry, words, and deeds are open to serious scholarly debate (2003: 233)

This is true of all the Biblical characters put forward as gay role-models by pro-gay biblical exegetists. I would suggest that gay-appropriation of nebulously homosexual/potentially bisexual individuals from Scripture is another invasive form of bisexual erasure, this time specific to theologians.

#### **4.3.4 Preoccupation with homosexuality & Same-Sex Marriage**

Perhaps it is the sheer lack of bisexual people that exist *per se* that renders a more rigorous debate of bisexuality in church sermons, literature and theological texts surplus to requirements. After all, only 0.4 per cent of UK people surveyed self-identified as bisexual in

the 2011 UK Census<sup>102</sup> - approximately 220,000 adults in a populace of 56.1 million. While such figures are potentially affected by a fear of coming out and all that entails, even at the relatively anonymous bureaucratic level, we can only assume that the actual incidence of bisexual people is higher. However, only 1.1% of the population claimed a gay or lesbian identity in the same Census which by this logic, would not merit the excessive attention given to the homosexual issue in the Church! (As a point of comparison, the figures for those living below the poverty line in the UK stand at around 20% at present<sup>103</sup>, but the Christian Church in the UK does not appear to be twenty times more concerned with feeding the poor than opposing gay rights.)

So it appears that the rather sinister silence on bisexuality cannot be explained by low incidence of bisexual people. If this were the case, then homosexuality would hardly feature on the Church's radar either, yet homosexuality, and same-sex marriage in particular, dominate the headlines in broadcast media, with the latter a particular focus of theological debate. A large bulk of the denominational literature outlined under 4.2 locates its discussion of homosexuality around gay marriage. The argument that few bisexual people come forward within our churches to make their views known is circular; in a climate where their identity is given little credence and dialogue non-existent, there is little platform to make one's voice heard.

And this silence is not restricted to the Church of England. As the Anglican Church itself concedes: '...most of the studies of Christian attitudes to sexuality by individual authors would lead to the conclusion that human sexuality exclusively occurs in heterosexual or homosexual forms (2003:214).'

What is behind the silence on bisexuality? Is it scaremongering to speak of a conspiracy of silence on the bisexual issue?

#### **4.3.5 Horizontal Oppression: Erasure from within**

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<sup>102</sup> See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics\\_of\\_sexual\\_orientation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics_of_sexual_orientation)

<sup>103</sup> See *Poverty in the UK* <http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/our-work/poverty-in-the-uk>

This silence is not restricted to the heterosexist power bases represented by the mainstream Christian Church in the UK. Within the LGBT Christian community itself, there appears to be a malaise with bisexuality that similarly translates into silence on the issue:

Prejudice within some religious communities contributes profoundly to the isolation and marginalisation of bisexual people within these communities. There are community organisations for LGBT Muslims, Christians and Jewish people. However, there are few bisexual-specific groups and there may be low levels of bisexual awareness amongst such LGBT groups (OU 2012:31).

Of the LGBT Christian organisations, either a punchy non-queer-specific moniker is adopted (*Quest, Outcome, Affirm, Accepting Evangelicals, Two:23*) or their name includes only the lesbian and gay contingent of the queer populace (*Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement, Evangelical Fellowship for Lesbian and Gay Christians*). In the case of lesbian and gay specific groups, there may well be practical considerations and a history behind the name that should be weighed up before passing judgement. Such groups often play a vital role in providing support to some very wounded individuals, yet are consistently denied funding by both the Church and secular LGBT-friendly organisations. Rebranding, as in time increasingly more sexual identities come to the fore and gain credence (bisexual, transgendered, intersex, queer or questioning and asexual), has costs attached that are frequently beyond the limited budgets of LGBT faith groups fighting for survival, as revealed to me in a personal email from erstwhile President of the Lesbian & Gay Christian Movement, Reverend Sharon Ferguson, in 2013. There are further issues surrounding brand recognition – a name change could undo decades of hard work in achieving media visibility. Such practical concerns are legitimate and real and the goal of bi-visibility must perhaps be located within the bigger picture of achieving support for LGBT minorities as a whole. Such concessions, however, do not aid the bi-visibility cause.

Yet while there appears to be a palpable and genuine commitment to bisexual people, as indicated within the straplines and mission statements of such groups, the emphasis on *lesbian and gay* or use of the non-queer-specific moniker, does little to enhance the visibility of bisexual men and women of faith. This downplaying of bisexuality, intentionally or not (and in the author's view, this is largely *unintentional*), appears to be a common feature of most LGBT organisations, faith-based or otherwise. The sense of exclusion is increased by the lack of media exposure given to the "B" in LGBT, as the San Francisco Human Rights Committee's report on bi-invisibility uncovers:



Often, the word 'bisexual' shows up in an organization's name or mission statement, but the group doesn't offer programming that addresses the specific needs of bisexuals... Even when an organization is inclusive, the press and public officials often fall back on the 'safety' of saying just 'gay and lesbian.' There is even a growing trend of talking about the 'gay, lesbian, and transgender' community or 'lesbian, gay, and transgender' movement. But words matter. Invisibility matters (2011: 5).

Can we therefore justifiably speak of a conspiracy of silence within LGBT affirming organisations, too?

One theory put forward for bi-invisibility within LGBT faith groups is the dilutive effect of bisexuality on the group identity. As with other minority groups, it is possible that for the LGBT faith community, the clarity of its mission - and thereby its political power - is adjudged to be weakened by the bisexual person, who challenges the veracity and integrity of dualistic thinking on human sexuality, having a foot in both 'straight' and 'gay' camps. The 'bi now, gay later' epithet, a prejudice among homosexual people that bisexual people are really gays hiding in the closet of perceived heterosexual privilege, may also create a hostile climate for a bisexual person of faith to thrive within a faith-based gay-affirming organisation. The resorting to simplistic binary categories – Heyward's 'absolutization' (1999: 117) - precludes relationship and all too easily leads to horizontal oppression.

Horizontal oppression and repression of bisexual people within the Christian LGBT community, where this exists, is potentially as damaging to the bisexual individual as the silence within our churches. Perhaps more so, as in so doing, the LGBT faith organisations are failing in their bespoke mission to offer support to the whole LGBT community. The bisexual person of faith has already been damaged by the heteronormative environment of the mainstream church and so faces a 'double dip' repression. If such oppression truly exists, then an armistice on 'identity warfare' is surely called for.

#### **4.3.6 Bisexuality as disorder**

It is this fear of ambiguity, the psychosexual untidiness of bisexuality, which would appear to pose a threat to those who would have clarity on complex theological issues. As Stuart & Thatcher (1997) explain:

... bisexuals undermine the whole sexual system, the neat classification of people into homosexual and heterosexual, the pathologizing of homosexuality as a heterosexual disorder and so on. Bisexuality represents desire unfettered, and perhaps that is why those who experience it are so studiously unacknowledged in church documents, and

on the odd occasion where they are acknowledged, they are pathetically misrepresented as sexually indiscriminate and promiscuous (1997:190).

Bisexual people (similar to transgendered and intersex people of faith) are flies in the ointment of a (patriarchal) authoritarian system. Such a system seeks to impose behavioural boundaries on its subjects, where theological certainty, clarity of procedure, and the maintenance of existing power relations (often masquerading as the cuddlier term *family values*), take precedence over the realities of human experience and any form of compassionate quest for knowledge or understanding. This is the moralism defined by Heyward (1999) as ‘an ideology of rightness and a posturing of certitude that absolutizes ideas and abstractions rather than actual relationships that are loving and just (1999:17).’

This moralism is totally inflexible and cannot encompass actual human realities, as it is ‘unchanging, unbending, and therefore not open to honest questioning even by conscientious, responsible people (1999: 19).’

As Heyward points out: ‘When we are moralistic, we do not wish to have our ideas disrupted by questions or information pertaining to actual human need, feelings, or desire (1999: 117).’ The act of loving is thus subservient to theories of love. This pharisaic prioritising of theory over practice would seem juxtaposed to Christ’s notion of love as the fulfilment of the law (see Galatians 5:14).

This quest for certainty organically results in a ‘them and us’ situation, a simplistic organisation of subjects into binary categories that are more manageable. Such dichotomies (straight/gay; white/black; male/female) are convenient as they reinforce the group identity – in this scenario, as in western capitalist society, male white heterosexual supremacy – and greatly facilitate identity politics, for gays and straights alike.

The dualistic paradigm is contradicted by bisexual people, who are, in the words of Mary Hunt (Kolodny, 2000) ‘living proof that it is an inadequate way to think.’ Such binary thinking ‘excludes their reality entirely (2000: xi).’<sup>104</sup> Richard Rohr speaks of the ‘seven C’s of delusion’ and describes the sequencing of the dualistic mind that ‘compares, competes, conflicts,

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<sup>104</sup> See Mary E. Hunt, “Foreword: Conjectures of a Supportive Bi-Stander,” in Kolodny (2000)

conspires, condemns, cancels out any contrary evidence... then crucifies with impunity (Rohr, 2011)<sup>105</sup>.

The concept of bisexual people, within all communities, as obstacles to clarity is a view shared by Stuart (1996):

Bisexuality and transsexuality are not taken seriously by the Church or by society at large, nor indeed by the lesbian and gay community, because they undermine the cut and dried classification of sexuality and sex with which society operates and throw too many spanners in the works (1996:304).

Certainty cannot by definition encompass any trace of ambiguity, which goes some way in accounting for the relative paucity of dialogue on the bisexual experience. In this way, there does indeed appear to be a conspiracy of silence of sorts on bisexuality within the Church.

#### **4.4 Bisexuality, Christianity & Mental Health**

At the point of writing, there are no studies available, which specifically look at bisexual mental health for people of Christian faith, which is perhaps not surprising given the widespread silence on bisexuality within the Christian church. Nathalie Charron of St Paul's University, Ottawa, has written on this subject in an MA Thesis of 2014 entitled *Bisexual Women in the Christian Faith: Composing with a Complex Identity*. However, the participation of just two women in this study, despite a public call for participants, highlights just some of the problems in finding bisexual people willing to discuss the bisexuality/faith intersection.

Charron's findings can be summarised as below:

- Both women experienced discrimination from being non-heterosexual and bisexual within Christian circles, particularly within Catholic and fundamentalist evangelical settings
- There was difficulty in accessing the secular activist world on account of their Christian faith
- There was discrimination from lesbians for being bisexual
- Both faced discrimination for being women in Christian settings
- Both felt invisible as bisexual women

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<sup>105</sup> p.147

- They felt there was a schism between how they perceived their own sexual identity and the assumption of infidelity from both the Christian and secular world (Charron, 2014)

Charron found the impact of quadruple minority status of bisexual Christian women to be upheld in the results of her research, namely the effects on mental health and wellbeing for those who identify as non-heterosexual, non-monosexual, of sexual minority status with religious faith, and female.

Gibbs & Goldbach (2015) have written on religious conflict in LGBT young people, investigating the effect of minority stress on LGBT suicidality. Whilst the sample was infinitely larger than Charron's study, at just shy of three thousand participants, it unfortunately did not separate bisexual data from lesbian and gay data. As a result, it is not possible to ascertain from this study the exact impact of homophobia and other stresses on bisexual people. The main findings of relevance to this study are highlighted below:

- LGBT young adults leaving the church for self-acceptance are more at risk of suicide due to loss of support systems despite gains in personal freedom.
- LGBT young adults who experience religious identity conflict are at significant risk of suicide.
- LGBT Christians experience better outcomes when involved in LGBT affirming faith communities than when not attending church at all.

(Gibbs & Goldbach, 2015)

#### **4.5 BME Bisexual Christians**

If we add ethnicity to the intersectional mix, then the experience of the BME bisexual Christian further challenges dualistic thinking on human sexuality: 'The double discrimination of racism and biphobia/homophobia impacts hugely on those in ethnic minorities who have 'same-and other' gender attraction (OU, 2012)<sup>106</sup> Here the individual concerned contends also with the intersecting identities of ethnicity and sexual orientation. The San Francisco Human Rights Committee's report on bisexuality (SFHRC, 2011b) speaks of bisexual ethnic minorities having

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<sup>106</sup> p.29

to 'navigate through both white gay communities and the homophobic segments of black communities (2011:18).'

This same report found that gender-role stereotypes are often enforced within Afro-American/Afro-Caribbean cultures: 'Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth of colour often have a difficult time finding acceptance in their communities due to gender-role stereotypes that are enforced and expected in their cultures (2011:17).'

In Latino communities, a combination of *machismo* and rigid Catholicism does not only prevent discussion of homosexuality/bisexuality but has a negative impact on sexual health, too:

Additionally, in many Latino communities, the combined effects of 'machismo' and devout Catholicism can fuel homophobia, and in some cases, forbid the use of condoms, creating a barrier to sexual health education and HIV prevention information for Latino bisexual and gay youth... Black and Latino communities, while successful at instilling cultural pride and traditions, can sometimes create a hostile environment for sexual exploration and development for sexual minority youth (2011:18).

The prevailing culture has a significant effect on biphobia - a 2012 article published by the American Orthopsychiatric Association pointed to the greater religiosity amongst black and Latino LGBT people in the US, which leads to elevated levels of internalised homophobia.<sup>107</sup> LGBT black and minority ethnic Christians are also more likely to attend non-affirming religious services than their white counterparts, where bisexuality is actively denounced or covered-up. These cultural findings would appear to find resonance this side of the Atlantic in the Open University's 2012 Bisexuality Report, where, it is noted, 'some black British people may reject potential LGBT identities due to a perception that these are part of white culture (2012: 29).'

In addition, bisexual people of colour, particularly women, face the ignominy of a double dose of prejudice, with the cultural stereotyping of black women as hypersexual further 'boosted' by the perception of the promiscuous bisexual (OU, 2012).

#### **4.6 Conclusion**

If we take into account the elevated risk of poor mental health and suicide rates as outlined in Chapter 3 and add this to the overwhelming silence on bisexuality within the mainstream Christian Church and its satellite organisations, it is small wonder that spiritual acceptance -

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<sup>107</sup> See <http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/press/press-releases/new-study-shows-latino-and-black-lesbians-gay-men-and-bisexuals-lgbs-are-more-religious-than-white-lgbs-and-more-likely-to-attend-non-gay-affirming-religious-services/>

and its by-product, spiritual wholeness - feels little more than a distant dream for bisexual people of faith. This silence extends to what young people are taught in our churches on sexuality. From personal experience as a parent, the subject of same-sex attraction is either ignored or generalised in youth resources, as in adult material, with potentially devastating consequences for vulnerable young people struggling to come to terms with their identity. There can be no positive role models in a culture where deviations from heterosexual marriage are not viewed positively and dissenting voices are silenced.

Yet, as Barbara Gibson points out (Kolodny, 2000), bisexual people of faith, and particularly women, have so much to offer a church community ravaged by fear and division, as they 'know how to be part of more than one world (2000:187).' For Gibson, bisexual women have a particular role in creating a spirituality that is available to all people, an ability to bridge and connect opposing genders and sexualities, by virtue of the alienation and inclusion they have experienced at the hands of both camps.

It is hard to see whether this optimistic sentiment will become reality until there is a shift in dynamic in how the mainstream Christian Church approaches contentious issues such as human sexuality. It is always easier, as Elizabeth Andrew points out (Kolodny, 2000), to 'condemn those who live outside the rules than to question whether the standards we have for moral behaviour, which we hold so dear, are destroying us.'<sup>108</sup>

But it is also hard to see how both the mainstream Church and LGBT faith groups can address invisibility if bisexual people of faith are not willing to render *themselves* visible. There are LGBT support groups for all denominations, but nothing specifically for bisexual Christians run by bisexual Christians in the UK (as far as online searches reveal). Any criticisms of Church and LGBT faith groups must thus be tempered by an honest recognition that bisexual Christians are often less than willing to take the initiative in promoting their own visibility – an issue that merits further study and is seen in the qualitative data collected in Chapters 6-12.

It seems there is much work to do both in the field of biblical studies and Christian sexual ethics before we can speak in any real terms of visibility for bisexual people of faith.<sup>109</sup>But

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<sup>108</sup> p.252

<sup>109</sup> This point is made by Farley: 'That there is much room for development of Christian beliefs and moral codes regarding sexuality is generally acknowledged by theologians and ethicists today (2006:187).'

there is also much work to be done *among* Christian bisexuals towards their own empowerment.

The next part of this research explores to what extent bisexual Christians in the UK and US feel empowered/disempowered to live with integrity and openness as dual attracted followers of Christ. This details the lived experiences of bisexual people of faith from the US and UK interviewed from February – August 2016, the methodology for which is outlined in the next chapter.





## Part II



## CHAPTER 5

### Methodology

In this chapter, I outline my chosen methodology for examining the lived experiences of bisexual Christians and discuss why I have rejected existing approaches towards Christian sexual ethics.

#### 5.1 Failings of traditional Christian sexual ethics

Typically, Christian ethicists have utilised the so-called Wesleyan Quadrilateral<sup>110</sup> as a means, if not strictly an academic methodology, of tackling arising theological and pastoral issues. By this method, an analysis of the four sources (or foundations) of the quadrilateral take place – namely: tradition, scripture, human reason (or secular knowledge) and contemporary experience – with each source informing and interacting with each other to arrive at a ‘solution’ to the ethical conundrum or moral dilemma posed (Farley, 2006).

Therefore, a theology of how to live ethically as a homosexual Christian, for example, may be reached by considering church history (tradition) and reworking traditional interpretations of the Bible (scripture), alongside input from other academic disciplines (human reason), plus a listening process involving live subjects or using findings from existing studies undertaken by academics in the field (contemporary experience). Any proposed solutions, however, must still sit within a Christian ethical framework as prescribed by the said tradition. This may well offer little ‘wiggle room’ for evolution/revolution. In addition, the ‘prescribers’ of the ‘new’ ethic are generally not taken from the lay members of the church (though they may be consulted) but are educated clergy people. From this perspective, traditional Christian sexual ethics are not organic (of the people) but hegemonic (imposed upon submissive subjects), the ‘them and us’ theology, as defined by Stephen Lingwood (2010).

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<sup>110</sup> See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wesleyan\\_Quadrilateral](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wesleyan_Quadrilateral)

From my literature review, it became clear that the Wesleyan Quadrilateral was not an appropriate vehicle for constructing a bisexual Christian ethic. The initial and rather obvious issue facing the researcher is the conceptual absence of bisexuality within Scripture. There is no obvious framework of reference for the bisexual Christian picking up the Bible for advice, encouragement or critical engagement (and this 'silence' is discussed in Chapter 3 of this thesis). Whilst there are passages of the Bible which would seem to infer a bisexual disposition on the part of a certain individual<sup>111</sup> within the narrative, such inferences can be no more than supposition, since there are no explicit references to dual attraction that are clearly and unambiguously of an erotic nature. Subsequently, in the absence of clear and obvious reference points within the Scriptures, there are virtually no references to bisexuality within the doctrinal statements, liturgies and publications, of the Christian church - with perhaps the exception being the 6th century Penitentials, which made reference to bisexual sexual behaviour<sup>112</sup>.

The ground is more fruitful in the realm of human reason, with the Victorian sexologists and the post-war findings of Alfred Kinsey et al. (1948), Fritz Klein (1978), Charlotte Wolff (1979), Martin Weinberg et al. (1994), Phillip Blumstein & Pepper Schwartz (Storr, 1999), Surya Monro (2015) and Eric Anderson & Mark McCormack (2016) all contributing to an emerging understanding of bisexuality and bisexual behaviour. These findings are charted in Chapter 2: Bisexuality in Science.

Yet when it comes to contemporary experience, there appears to be little available material on which to draw any conclusions on how bisexual Christians live and deal with their sexuality.<sup>113</sup> My own literature review uncovered a number of works on bisexual experience, both faith-based or otherwise, but all but nothing on the experiences of Christians who identify as bisexual, and certainly not within the UK. (Indeed, this absence is a driving force and motivation for this research.) It became apparent that the traditional methods of 'doing' Christian ethics, via the four interactive sources of tradition, scripture, reason and contemporary experience, would not prove effective and were indeed unviable. Two of the four sources, as outlined above, simply did not offer sufficient material from which to draw.

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<sup>111</sup> The passages usually cited involve David and Jonathan and Ruth and Naomi

<sup>112</sup> See <http://www.thehistoryblog.com/archives/4696>

<sup>113</sup> The exception to this would be Kolodny, Debra R. (ed), 2000. *Blessed Bi Spirit: Bisexual People of Faith*. New York: Continuum

Theoretical developments such as Liberation Theology, Queer Theory (and its spiritual offshoot, Queer Theology) - as outlined in Chapter 4 - offer new perspectives on human sexuality but do not provide a methodological framework as such for investigating the lives of bisexual Christians.

## **5.2 Grounded Theory: A General Overview**

The methodological tool that appeared to offer the optimal means of both uncovering the lived experience of bisexual Christians, and assessing how ecclesiastical and pastoral organisations manage minority sexualities, was grounded theory and indeed this was the tool of choice for this study.

Grounded theory is a systematic methodology which involves constructing theory via the collection and analysis of data (Martin & Turner, 1986). This is qualitative, not quantitative research; no figures or statistical data are presented, rather empirical data is used as the basis for comparing concepts and arriving at conceptual hypotheses or probability statements (Glaser & Strauss, 1971). Empirical data may be derived from autobiographies, published accounts or records, novels, interviews and case-studies, field notes or journals (Charmaz, 1996). Rather than following a fixed list of preordained questions, the researcher is concerned with obtaining information from the data alone:

The hallmark of grounded theory studies consists of the researcher deriving his or her analytic categories directly from the data, not from preconceived concepts or hypotheses (Charmaz, 1996).<sup>114</sup>

Grounded theory as a methodology was developed by sociologists Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in 1967. Empirical data is captured and coded (categorised). Initially these codes are 'open' and fairly general, with as wide a range as possible of material included. As repeated ideas and concepts emerge from these interviews (or other sources of empirical data), it becomes possible to categorise and conceptualise this data via selective coding and reflective memo writing, eventually producing the basis for a new theory (or in this case, theology).

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<sup>114</sup> p.32

The rationale behind grounded theory was to move away from social science research using the positivist tradition, where data was tested against preconceived theories (Martin & Turner, 1986). The formulation of hypotheses in advance resulted in theory that was not sufficiently grounded in the actual data (Glaser & Strauss, 1971) and therefore did not necessarily express the lived experience of participants.

Thus grounded theory is 'emergent' in that it bases its theories on the data itself and not from any preconceived hypotheses (Charmaz, 2008). It is also emergent in the sense that increasingly more theoretical categories and connections between data are possible as more data is collected and analysed (Glaser & Strauss, 1971). It is 'interpretative,' based on knowledge 'from the inside' (Charmaz, 1996)<sup>115</sup> in contrast to traditional positivistic analyses, which bring in views from 'the outside' - those of the researcher and a 'describable, predictable world' (Charmaz, 1996).<sup>116</sup> Key issues are allowed to emerge from the data, rather than data being shoehorned into preconceived categories driven by existing findings from the field of study (Charmaz, 1996). It is thus inductive rather than deductive and also incarnational in its focus on lived experience.

In common with Liberation Theology (see Chapter 4), grounded theory offers this specific project the potential for the creation of an organic theology - 'us' theology over 'them' theology (Lingwood, 2010). Instead of theology being imposed on the minority by the heterosexual majority, a grounded approach enables the voices of bisexual people to be heard and used as the basis for a new LGBT Christian ethic. This is ground-breaking, given the total absence of bisexual Christian voices within theological debate in the UK.<sup>117</sup>

Grounded theory has evolved over the past half century, shifting from its original 'researcher as observer' position (Charmaz, 2003) to one involving a more interactive, participatory role for the researcher in the construction of theory (Walker & Myrick, 2006). This 'constructivist'

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<sup>115</sup> p.30

<sup>116</sup> p.31

<sup>117</sup> As I write, Jaime Sommers has published '119: My Life as a Bisexual Christian,' an autobiographical account of life as a bisexual Christian wife and mother in the UK.

grounded theory popularised by Charmaz (Mills, Bonner, & Francis, 2006), argues that the researcher is organically implicated in the emerging theory, by way of his or her participation in the process of gathering and interpreting data. Thus not only the experience of participants is documented (social behaviour) and accounted for, but also the interaction between all participants, researcher included, in arriving at conclusions. As Charmaz notes:

Unlike Glaser, I assume that the interaction between the researcher and the researched *produces* the data, and therefore the meanings that the researcher observes and defines (1996: 35).

The researcher is thus implicitly involved in the capturing of data and ensuing construction of theory. Constructivist grounded theory acknowledges the roles played by all participants – researcher and researched – in constructing theory, whereas classic grounded theory simply seeks to account for social behaviour (Breckenridge, Jones, Elliott, & Nicol, 2012).

The danger of unduly influencing which data is captured and how it is interpreted is offset by exercising reflexivity at every stage. The conceptual emergence of reflexivity as good practice is indicative of a scholarly awareness that a researcher's personality and life experiences inevitably impact on the research environment (McGhee, Marland, & Atkinson, 2007). As Suddaby notes:

... they (researchers) must engage in ongoing self-reflection to ensure that they take personal biases, world-views, and assumptions into account, while collecting, interpreting and analysing data (Suddaby, 2006).<sup>118</sup>

The importance of reflexivity is further underlined by Birks & Mills (2011) and Mruck & Mey (2007). This self-reflection is attained by keeping memos throughout the interview and transcription process:

Memos can provide a written record of reflexivity, if, as you write about your actions and feelings, the influences on your thinking, you incorporate an analysis of impact and outcome (Birks & Mills 2011: 53).

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<sup>118</sup> p.640

Reflective practice, involving the writing of memos and ongoing coding and revisiting of data, ensures that data is not only grounded in the lived experience of interviewees, but also acknowledges the researcher's own role in the shaping and constructing of theory. In the next section, I consider the merits and drawbacks of using grounded theory.

### **5.3 The Potential of Grounded Theory for exploring the bisexuality/faith intersection**

The first obvious option that a (constructivist) grounded theory methodology offers is the ability to generate new data missing from existing studies within the field. In terms of LGBT themed sociological and theological research, the absence of bisexuality as a standalone subject of enquiry is all too clear (Stuart & Thatcher, 1997). It is my intention to use grounded theory to obtain a source of base material to explore how bisexual Christians may be better integrated within faith communities (if indeed this is possible). Owing to the lack of available first-hand accounts of the experiences of bisexual people of faith, the collection of empirical data by way of semi-structured interviews with willing participants would seem to offer the optimum means of obtaining an insight into the issues affecting bisexual people. As discussed earlier, there is no existing theoretical framework in Scripture or church traditions against which the experiences of bisexual people can be measured.

The absence of existing material on how bisexual people of faith conduct themselves and resolve their issues would seem to render an emergent method of qualitative analysis the most appropriate vehicle for obtaining such data:

Emergent methods are particularly well suited for studying uncharted, contingent, or dynamic phenomena (Charmaz, 2008).<sup>119</sup>

A second advantage of grounded theory is the validity of the data captured. Ecological validity<sup>120</sup> describes the extent to which research data mirrors the reality. In trying to assess

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<sup>119</sup> p.155

<sup>120</sup> See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ecological\\_validity](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ecological_validity)



what life is like for the bisexual Christian, it is imperative that the methodology employed results in an accurate picture of the individual's experience. Grounded theory is usually ecologically valid, as it is based on primary evidence gained from the insider, or research participant, rather than from suppositional statements made by outsiders.

In terms of providing an authentic voice, Grounded Theory methodology is therefore also consistent with the principles of queer theory and insider/outsider theory (McCutcheon, 1999). Such principles dictate that only the insider, i.e. those individuals directly affected by an issue, can truly speak with an authentic voice. Lingwood (2010:33) speaks of 'them' and 'us' theology; all too often non-LGBT people take it upon themselves to describe and prescribe issues faced by LGBT Christians with little or no recourse to actual lived experience of bisexual people.

Grounded theory also consolidates Liberation Theology's ethos of building theology from the bottom up, using the voices of the oppressed and marginalised as a basis for interpreting/reinterpreting the meaning and relevance of Scripture. To give expression to these voices, grounded theorists often make use of *in vivo* codes in forming hypotheses, consisting of interviewees' direct statements (Charmaz, 2008). Given that so little has been written on the bisexuality/faith intersection, it is vital that the methodological tool selected has the ability to generate new information and illuminate the issues at hand from the perspective of – and in the words of – the participants themselves.

#### **5.4 Potential Problems with the Grounded Theory approach**

The use of grounded theory is not without with potential hazards, however. The first and perhaps most obvious obstacle is the labour intensive nature of grounded theory as a methodology. Clearly there is a need to obtain enough material to formulate a theory (or set of theories) for the issue at hand. Charmaz (2006) speaks of the need to gather sufficient data to truly speak of 'theoretical saturation' of a conceptual idea, i.e. the point at which no new data is found that challenges the emerging theory. Given each individual's story will be unique to a

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certain extent, it may be more appropriate to speak of 'sufficient evidence' of emerging concepts rather than theoretical saturation.

The importance of thorough coding at the 'open' or 'initial' coding stage is also highlighted by Charmaz (2006), as a means of remaining close to the voice of the interviewee and not colouring the data with the researcher's own issues and preconceptions. The importance of 'code as you go' is underlined by Charmaz (1996) to offset the dangers of generating too much unsorted data. This can overwhelm the researcher and prevent new ideas seeing the light of day. (From my personal experience, however, the need to 'strike while the iron's hot' with consenting participants may well result in the stockpiling of a large number of non-transcribed audio recordings).

Glaser (B. G. Glaser, 1998) feels that taping interviews is too time-consuming to be productive. However, Charmaz (1996) believes recording and transcribing to be an important means of becoming familiar with the material - particularly for the novice. As a relative novice, I elected to record all interviews via a range of media outlined later in this chapter.

There is therefore a clear tension between obtaining enough data to establish reasonably consistent theories yet not being overwhelmed by data, and between allowing time for theoretical saturation yet working in a time-effective manner. Whilst software packages exist to expedite the coding and memo writing process (NVivo, Dedoose, to name but two), in reality these may prove time-consuming to learn and assimilate, especially if the researcher is new to qualitative data collection or not skilled in IT.

Another potential pitfall surrounds collusion between the researcher and their subject or data - or put more simply, researcher bias. As Charmaz notes:

Qualitative researchers often receive advice to choose research topics that affect their lives. Since the inception of the method, grounded theorists have pursued substantive topics in which they held a decided stake (2008:163).

Writing as a bisexual woman of Christian faith, there is a clear risk that I will allow my own emotions, experiences and motivations to colour my interpretation of data or my interaction

with the research participant. Charmaz proposes 'engaging in reflexivity and invoking grounded theory strategies' (2008:163) to offset this danger, including line by line initial coding. Glaser (1998) however, points out the dangers inherent in discussing the project with overly positive or overly negative colleagues, as there is a danger the researcher will be led either to a place of complacency or discouragement. Self-reflection in tandem with feedback from an independent colleague may be a more prudent course of action. It is my intention to make use of colleagues in non-related subject areas to this end and have already sourced colleagues at two separate academic institutions to this end.

Researcher bias may also occur through familiarity with the subject matter. Glaser & Strauss (1971) warn against engaging in a literature review before undertaking qualitative research. This can lead to preconceived ideas of what the researcher will find and lead them to borrow existing concepts at the expense of discovering new strands. But Thomas & James criticise the notion that the researcher can be free of preconceptions (Thomas & James, 2006). The researcher inevitably comes to the topic through knowledge of their own discipline and existing theories in the field, therefore it is a somewhat unrealistic aim to claim otherwise. Charmaz (2008) expresses doubt that it is possible to deal discerningly with data without sufficient prior theoretical knowledge, in any case.

Discernment and flexibility are also required. Where empirical data acts as the primary source material (as is the case with grounded theory), there is an obvious risk that the data will take the researcher in an unanticipated direction of travel. The researcher should display the flexibility to follow more 'interesting and relevant material' that may emerge, whilst remaining true to the data itself and to the area of study (Charmaz 1996:48).

Along with flexibility, an ability to deal with ambiguity is also necessary to remain receptive to new concepts and offshoots (Charmaz, 2008). However, ambiguity and flexibility are behavioural traits that perhaps come more easily to non-binary sexual identities in any case. As Margaret Garber comments: 'Bisexuality undoes statistics, confounds dimorphism, creates a volatile set of subjects who will not stay put in neat and stable categories (1995:283).'

It was not anticipated that the data would throw up a uniform set of individuals and stories and indeed this subsequently proved to be the case.

## **5.5 Institutional Restrictions**

My decision to utilise constructivist grounded theory was to a degree motivated by the restrictions placed on me by my own academic institution. The University of Winchester requires the completion of a literature review prior to upgrade to PhD candidature and there was therefore no option of conducting interviews with an entirely open mind, as proposed by Glaser & Strauss (1971) (though Mills et al (2006) dispute this was Glaser & Strauss' actual intention).

In any case, I share Thomas & James (2006) view that it is realistically impossible to be free of preconceptions and subjective viewpoints, given the researcher's assumed prior interest in the subject area and familiarity with existing material. In projects that are in any shape or form auto-ethnographical – which this is, owing to my own intersectional identity as a bisexual Christian – there is clearly a degree of personal interest and prior knowledge brought to bear on the research framework. For that very reason, I felt it was prudent to adopt Charmaz's self-reflective position, whereby the researcher codes the material thoroughly to avoid potential personal bias yet also creates memos as a form of reflective journal, to document the researcher's own interaction with the interviewee and data generated and observe any possible bias on the researcher's part. Charmaz (2006: 10) summarises the differences in approaches, from Glaser and Strauss's view of the researcher as 'scientific observer' to her own position whereby the researcher plays an interactive role with participants, constructing theory between them, rather than uncovering theory purely through empirical data.

Therefore, the process followed generally commenced with initial open coding of each interview transcription, followed by focused coding, involving sub-categorisation of codes, whilst keeping reflective memos of any thoughts that emerged in so doing. As each transcription was coded in this way, certain themes began to emerge, which formed the basis of the analyses found in Chapters 6 to 9. Due to the aforementioned urgency to record willing participants at the point of contact (since bisexual Christians who openly identify as such, let

alone who are willing to be interviewed, are not easy to find), this process was not always strictly adhered to.

## **5.6 Recruitment of Participants and Data Capture**

Prior to conducting designing my qualitative research model, it was necessary to apply for and obtain ethics clearance from the University of Winchester. Once obtained, it was then decided with my Director of Studies (DOS) to create a four cell research model, involving ten participants in each. These research cells would entail a cross comparison between liberal and fundamentalist Christians in the UK and US concerning their views on bisexuality (i.e. liberal Christians in the UK; liberal Christians in the US; fundamentalist Christians in the UK; fundamentalist Christians in the US). However, it soon became apparent as I attempted to recruit participants from the fundamentalist side, that few were willing to speak openly concerning their prejudices against LGBT Christians, despite the copious material available on the internet, in the form of personal blogs and church/organisational statements. This was particularly noticeable when I attempted to contact ex-gay ministries and a typical response is included in **Appendix 5**. I did manage to get one questionnaire completed by an ex-gay practitioner, which I have included within Chapter 10 and which clearly outlines the fundamentalist Christian position towards same-sex attraction in any form.

It became necessary to rethink my research cells. It occurred to me that a more fruitful route to pursue would actually involve questioning LGBT affirming pastors and support organisations on how they uphold bisexual congregants/clients. It is already abundantly clear from church websites and other online resources what line-conservative evangelicals hold on LGBT issues; given the authoritarianism inherent within such churches, it felt unlikely any pastor would stray from official church policy on matters of human sexuality in any case. Ideas from LGBT pastors and support groups could potentially form the basis of some progressive new theories on how best to include and empower bisexual people of faith. I thus restructured my research cells into the following four sections: Pastors and Supporters of Bisexual People in the UK; Bisexual Christians in the UK; Pastors and Supporters of Bisexual People in the US; Bisexual Christians in the US. The two chapters on pastoral support (6 and 10) would include an overview on existing

provision within the UK and US respectively for supporting LGBT people of faith, followed by the actual lived experiences of bisexual Christians in these two nations.

Having already elected to use a constructivist grounded theory approach, where my own participation as researcher was acknowledged and monitored via reflexivity, I decided on a semi-structured interview format. I devised a list of questions which I ran by my Director of Studies and amended through discussion and these formed the basis of the participant questionnaire found in **Appendix 3**. This seemed to me the best means of ensuring that the necessary information was elicited from participants, whilst also giving them the opportunity to speak freely and to ask reactive follow-up questions of them. These questions were not followed in strict order though I tried to ensure I covered all or most of them, whilst also asking additional questions to probe further areas of interest or where information shared was unclear. These questions also formed the basis of a questionnaire which was sent to those participants unwilling to partake in face to face or telephone/video calls.

I also discussed the option of running a focus group prior to conducting qualitative interviews to generate ideas for questions. My DOS felt this was unnecessary as I already had a fairly clear idea of what subject matter was relevant to cover. I elected instead to create a brief Survey Monkey questionnaire online, with ten questions. I advertised this on Social Media via Facebook and Twitter, and using a couple of online support groups, but this generated just twelve valid responses over a 14 month period (February 2016 – April 2017), including four from the UK and 8 from the US. The results from these Survey Monkey questionnaires are included in **Appendix 4**. The limitations of such free online surveys (ten questions maximum) did enable me to clarify which information was absolutely key and through the responses to questions, I was able to gauge which further areas of interest might be explored in interviews or longer questionnaires.

I then set about recruiting participants in the UK and US for interviews. For this purpose, I emailed existing LGBT acquaintances within church circles and LGBT faith organisations – I am fortunate in having extensive contacts in these areas from previous church leadership and charity board membership. I then tweeted information about the study to secular bisexual and LGBT faith groups, as well as contacting specifically bisexual or LGBT communities (both

Christian and secular, virtual and physical) via Facebook, including national bisexual networks in the United States, University LGBT societies in the UK and regional bisexual support groups. I also directly contacted a number of pastors in churches both in the UK and US via email or online contact forms, to ensure a range of denominations and traditions were covered for those chapters charting the support offered to bisexual Christians both sides of the Atlantic. Via word of mouth, several congregants of these churches were also recruited for participation in the project.

These efforts proved very fruitful, also producing several research chains, with a snowball effect seen particularly with one LGBT affirming church in the North West of England ( $n=3$ ) and a Christian college in Tennessee ( $n=5$ ). Once my numbers in three of the four research cells extended beyond twenty participants, I had to make a decision around a cut off point for data collection, mindful of the tension between creating an increasingly varied and viable study through multiple participants, yet placing an additional burden on myself in terms of transcription workload. I decided on a six month period, from February to August 2016, which included a two week trip to the United States in May 2016 to interview leading voices within both the LGBT faith and secular bisexual communities. The table below breaks down the number of participants per research cell, plus additional responses from an exploratory Survey Monkey questionnaire.

*Table 5.1 Breakdown of Research Cells*

Research Cell	Title of Research Cell	No. of Participants
1	Bi-Affirming Pastors & Educators in the UK	14
2	Bisexual Christians in the UK	28
3	Bi-Affirming Pastors & Educators in the USA	19*
4	Bisexual Christians in the USA	26
-	Survey Monkey Questionnaire: 'Bisexual Christian Mental Health'	12

\* Four of those interviewed also featured in RC4; therefore the total number of participants in all four research cells, excluding the Survey Monkey Questionnaire, numbered **83**.

## 5.7 Interview Process & Data Protection

To interview participants in Research Cells 1-4, a range of media were employed. The majority were interviewed via Skype video, Skype audio, telephone or face to face. One used FaceTime. Some were only willing to respond to questionnaires, which I offered if they refused the other means of communication. I feel that questionnaires do not typically generate as much information, as much is gained through live interaction with the participant, but at the same time, completion of a questionnaire was clearly preferable to non-participation. A breakdown of interview methods is found below.

*Table 5.2 Breakdown of Interview Methods per Research Cell*

Research Cell	Face to Face	Facetime	Skype Video	Skype Audio	Telephone	Questionnaire
1	5	0	2	1	6	0
2	7	0	4	1	11	5
3	11	0	7	0	0	1
4	6	1	6	5	1	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>14</b>

Skype video and audio calls were recorded via Skype recording software. For this purpose, I used free online Skype MP3 recorder software, but I also installed SuperTinTin as a backup to guarantee data recordings. For cell-phone and Facetime calls, I used a Sony Digitec MP3 voice recorder with my mobile on speakerphone. For face to face interviews, I used the Sony Digitec plus a backup Olympus voice recorder, erring again on the side of caution. I therefore had duplicate recordings of all interviews, whichever format they took.

All participants were sent a consent form and information sheet in advance and interviews only took place once consent was given (see **Appendix 1** and **2**). Whilst interviewees need not identify as cisgendered, all of them had to self-identify as bisexual (as opposed to other middle sexualities such as pansexual or gender fluid) and be a currently practising or former Christian,



able to comment on the experience of being bisexual within a faith community. One participant within the UK cell now identified as lesbian, but had identified previously as bisexual within a church setting and was therefore interviewed and indeed proved a rich source of information. Participants were told that they would be given a pseudonym, with only their county or State mentioned, to maintain confidentiality. Recordings would be used for 'notes and quotes' and I would not be publishing verbatim transcriptions within my thesis. These recordings would be deleted following official ratification of my doctorate, which was due to be October 2017. Participants in Research Cells 2 and 4 (actual bisexual participants) were saved under their pseudonyms on my computer from the start, to avoid data breaches. I installed McAfee Total Security on my desktop and laptop PCs so that all information was encrypted and all files were password protected should a third party gain access to my computers. Recordings were transcribed using Express Scribe software, which offers the functionality of slowing down audio files for ease of transcription. Each participant was also given an interview code number on my computer that linked to their specific research cell, and their interview transcript and consent form saved under this code.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted based on the list of probable questions prepared and approved by my Director of Studies. However, these were not asked in chronological order nor followed 'religiously,' allowing space for further probing and follow-up questions. The list of prepared questions for participants in RC1 & 3, which also formed the basis of the questionnaire option, can be found in **Appendix 3**. In addition, certain issues began to emerge as I coded initial interviews, which prompted me to diversify from the original list of questions in order to address these emergent areas.

A number of US participants ( $n=4$ ) had a professional and a personal story to tell. These were pastors and activists who additionally identified as bisexual. With negotiation, I agreed to protect their professional life by splitting these transcriptions into two parts, including the professional comments under their real name in Chapters 9 and 10: *Bi-Affirming Pastors and Educators in the USA/ Bi-Affirming Pastors and Educators in the USA (Pastoral Issues)*, and their personal stories under a pseudonym in Chapters 11 and 12: *Bisexual Christians in the US/Bisexual Christians and Church Life in the USA*. I did not mention their geographical location when using their professional stories, to ensure confidentiality and to eliminate the possibility

of cross-referencing these individuals between Chapters 9, 10, 11 and 12. This felt a mutually beneficial method of preserving their professional dignity yet presenting valuable evidential material.

Interviews were generally 30-45 minutes in length, though some were as long as 90 minutes. I experienced some early teething problems with feedback from recording devices in the early interviews, but not to the extent where I could not transcribe the recordings. On the whole, I found female identified bisexuals far more willing to talk and elaborate on answers than their male counterparts and correspondingly, these interviews provided significantly more material for analysis.

In terms of participant balance, whilst I did contact organised groups for participants, such as bi community groups and LGBT churches, the snowball 'word of mouth' effect in both ensured that I interviewed a large number of 'non activist' or 'lay' bisexual people.

## **5.8 Demographics**

A reasonably wide geographical space was covered in both the UK and US and a breakdown of this is given in the relevant chapters. Perhaps typically for sexuality related research, nearly all participants were currently residing in large urban centres. Though all the UK interviewees in Research Cell 2, *Bisexual Christians in the UK*, were currently based in England, there were representatives from Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland and additionally participants with dual EU/UK nationality. To protect their confidentiality, I have not given statistics for these individuals, though in total, there were five non-English participants. One participant had dual EU/US nationality, but was based long-term in the UK, so I located that individual within the UK cell. All participants in Research Cell 4, *Bisexual Christians in the USA* identified as cisgendered, though two identified as transgender and bisexual within Research Cell 2, *Bisexual Christians in the UK*. In total, female/female-identified participants outnumbered male participants by just over 2:1 in the bisexual Christian participant cells, though a more balanced male/female ratio was found in the pastors and supporters cells.

A decision was made to contrast the liberal East Coast with the Bible Belt in the US, hence the decision to interview in Boston, Massachusetts and Dallas, Texas. The US trip also took in a day in New York, where I interviewed the staff of *Believe Out Loud!*, a leading Christian LGBT campaigning group. As Boston is home to global bisexual activist, Robyn Ochs, as well as the Bisexual Resource Center, it felt an appropriate centre to visit, and indeed I interviewed both parties.

In terms of age range, my participants ranged from the minimum age of 18 to 72 and came from all walks of life. As regards ethnicity, one UK participant from Research Cell 2 (Chapters 7-8) was Anglo-Indian, the rest were Caucasian. Of my US participants in Research Cell 4 (Chapters 11-12), one was Asian American, one was Afro-American and three were Latinos. A detailed breakdown of location, age, ethnicity and sexual identity of all participants can be found under the relevant chapters.



## CHAPTER 6

### Bi-Affirming Pastors & Educators in the UK

In this chapter, I consider the findings from interviews with participants in Research Cell 1 (RC1), namely pastors and educators in the UK who support bisexual people of the Christian faith. The interviewees represented three main organisational bodies: churches, LGBT church satellite groups and therapeutic practice (secular or faith-based).

#### 6.1 Research Cell 1 (RC1) Participants

It was my intention in this research cell to cover a broad range of bisexual pastoral practice in the UK, hence the decision to interview pastors from the major denominations in the UK, as well as leaders of denominational or ecumenical LGBT faith groups and psychotherapists (both Christian and secular). I also sought to cover a range of ages and geographical locations, to ensure generational and regional variations were accounted for. As public figures with an existing ministry or practice, the majority elected to use their real names in the study. A minority ( $n=4$ ) preferred to use a pseudonym for confidentiality reasons. Further details of my research methodology can be found in **Chapter 5**.

The aim of this research cell was to establish existing pastoral practice towards bisexual people of faith (if, indeed, it exists) and to uncover good inclusive practice not detailed within existing church policy documents, as outlined in Chapter 4, *Bisexuality & The Church*. This was with the objective of working towards a clearer understanding of how bisexual Christians might be integrated into faith communities.

Table 6.1: RC1 Bi-Affirming Pastors & Educators in the UK

RC	Name	Profession	Age	Interview Format
101	Matthew	Retired Anglican Priest & Spiritual Director, Hampshire	69	Face to Face
102	Belinda	Anglican Priest, Hampshire	59	Face to Face
103	Gladys	MCC <sup>121</sup> Pastor, Tyne & Wear	56	Skype Video
104	Grant	(Secular) Psychotherapist, Leicestershire	45	Skype Audio
105	Jeremy	(Christian) Psychotherapist, Surrey	63	Skype Video
106	Leonora	Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Officer & Methodist Minister, Yorkshire	61	Telephone
107	Lisa	Bisexual Academic & Anglican, London (originally from Australia)	50	Face to Face
108	Nina	Pastor & Family Therapist, Liberty Church, Lancashire	59	Telephone
109	Shanon	MCC Pastor, London	58	Face to Face
110	Terry	Representative of Quest (Catholic LGBT Group) & Rainbow Alliance of LGBT Catholics, Surrey	64	Telephone
111	Tracey	CEO, Lesbian & Gay Christian Movement, Nottinghamshire (Ecumenical)	52	Telephone
112	Barbara	Methodist Minister & District Convenor of Outcome LGBT Group, Lancashire	57	Telephone
113	Ruth	Christian Writer & Social Responsibility Officer, Church of England, Oxfordshire (Anglican)	50	Face to Face
114	Pádraig	Spiritual Retreat Leader, Northern Ireland	41	Telephone

<sup>121</sup> Metropolitan Community Church

As also proved the case with Research Cell 3: Bisexual Pastors and Educators in the US (Chapters 9 and 10), I struggled to find conservative evangelical pastors and organisations willing to talk to me about faith and sexuality matters, including a student-based charismatic church just minutes away from the University of Winchester. Reparative therapy organisations in the UK simply did not respond. Indeed, silence was the overwhelming response to my email and contact form requests to speak to conservative pastors about faith and sexuality – which cannot, of course, be tangibly documented.

## **6.2 Participant Demographic**

The regional demographic and age-range of participants can be seen from **Table 6.1**. A range of major denominations was covered, encompassing a broad spectrum of spiritual expression, from more conservative Anglican and Catholic traditions, to more progressive denominations (Methodist), to liberal fully LGBT affirming churches (Metropolitan Community Church, Liberty Church). In terms of religiosity, all but one participant expressed a living Christian faith, with the latter now describing themselves as 'not Christian.' All participants were Caucasian and all were British, except for one representative from Australia, who had lived and worked in the UK for a considerable length of time.

Of these participants, two openly identified as bisexual themselves ( $n=2$ ), one identified as bisexual in behaviour but did not self-identify as bisexual ( $n=1$ ) and one had previously identified as bi, but now identifies as lesbian ( $n=1$ ). Five identified as lesbian ( $n=5$ ); three identified as gay men; one identified as gender queer ( $n=1$ ); two identified as straight female ( $n=2$ ) and one identified as a straight male but could conceive of having a relationship with the same sex ( $n=1$ ).

The dominant middle-age range of participants in RC1 is probably explained by the level of experience and professional qualifications required to be pastoring or managing an organisation with care of vulnerable individuals amongst its remit. The lack of representatives from Baptist, United Reformed or conservative evangelical denominations was simply down to disinterest/refusal to participate.

### 6.3 Coding Categories

Initial and detailed coding of transcription manuscripts revealed the following categories and sub-categories and it is these categories which informed the content of this chapter.

*Table 6.2: Coding Categories & Sub-Categories for RC1*

Main Category	Sub-category
Definition of Bisexuality (6.4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How is bisexuality understood and defined?</li><li>• Replacement by new identities</li><li>• Ex-married people don't view themselves as bi</li></ul>
Pastoral practice (6.5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Affirming pastoral practice</li><li>• Church resources – availability and usage</li><li>• Non-affirming practice (see Motivation category)</li></ul>
Motivation (for affirming practice) (6.6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Witnessing suffering of others (homo/biphobia)</li><li>• Scriptural basis/sense of calling</li><li>• Social justice inc. asylum</li></ul>
Denominational differences (6.7)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Attitudes per denomination to bisexuality/same-sex</li><li>• Incidences of biphobia/homophobia</li><li>• <i>Issues in Human Sexuality</i> document</li></ul>
Relationship configurations (6.8)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Monogamy issues</li><li>• Pros and cons of polyamory</li><li>• 'Solutions' &amp; Happy Bisexuals</li></ul>
Mental Health (6.9)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Effects of binary culture</li><li>• Lack of bi visibility &amp; support</li></ul>



Bisexual Erasure (6.10)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Silence on the issue, link to pastoral practice</li> <li>• Clergy fear of sexual ambiguity</li> <li>• Erotophobia of the Church</li> <li>• Maintaining power relations/hierarchies</li> <li>• Ignoring the B in LGBT communities – ‘Double Whammy’ effect/Minority Stress Theory (MST)</li> <li>• Intersectionality, especially BME bisexuals</li> </ul>
Bi Community (6.11)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National/Regional variations</li> <li>• Organisations and roles</li> </ul>
Social change/cultural factors (6.12)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generational variations/shifts in attitude, including</li> <li>• Recognition/fear of personal ambiguity</li> <li>• Reactions to being ‘out’</li> <li>• Pluralism – diversity as strength</li> </ul>
Positive Outcomes (6.13)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Existence of happy bisexuals</li> </ul>
Conclusion (6.14)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Summary of findings</li> </ul>

#### 6.4 Bisexual Definitions & Identity

It felt necessary to explore what each respondent understood by bisexuality to ensure clarity on issues discussed.

Lisa, a bisexual academic, favoured the simple description used by the Bisexual Index<sup>122</sup> amongst others, as bisexuality being an attraction to more than one gender, and not necessarily cis-gendered. She also highlighted the importance of ‘honouring the sexual’ in her relationships.

<sup>122</sup> See <http://www.bisexualindex.org.uk/index.php/bisexuality>

Ruth, a Social Responsibility Adviser for the Church of England, also emphasised the sexual component, describing bisexuality as the ability 'to relate sexually to men and women.' However, she disliked the gender limitations of bisexual as a descriptor: 'I've had relationships with men, I've had relationships with women... I don't identify as bisexual. I don't like the term, just because to me it reinforces the binary gender divide.'

This sentiment was echoed by Grant, a bisexual psychotherapist from the Midlands, who stated: 'I think of it around being attracted to people of more than one gender. I originally would have said some men and some women, but actually gender's more complicated than that, including the gender of my partners.'

Jeremy, a Christian psychotherapist from Surrey, saw sexuality as existing on a spectrum, with a vast sway of people actually existing somewhere between Kinsey's<sup>123</sup> polarities of exclusively straight or gay. Jeremy located bisexual people towards the middle of this range:

Probably there are a great deal more people in the middle of the spectrum than will admit it. And these people in the middle, which I would see as being bisexual, are those who genuinely experience attraction to members of either sex and possibly could make a relationship with either sex quite a satisfactory one.

Jeremy's views were echoed by Ruth:

There are clearly people who are clearly one thing and not the other and are at one end of the spectrum and that's it. But I think there's a lot more people who are in the middle of the spectrum or somewhere on the spectrum and it's hard to vocalise that and articulate that when our language and our self-understanding is so much determined by binary systems which we have had so strongly in place for so long.

Barbara, a Methodist Minister from Lancashire, felt 'gender is secondary', describing bisexuality as 'a word that describes a person who... isn't necessarily attracted to a person's gender, they're attracted to a person.'

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<sup>123</sup> See <https://www.kinseyinstitute.org/research/publications/kinsey-scale.php>

Pádraig, a Spiritual Community Leader from Northern Ireland, highlighted the difference between bisexual as a transient identity used in homophobic environments, such as Northern Ireland - where to identify as gay may often feel too dangerous - and true bisexual orientation: 'Some gay people begin, when they're younger, to come to people first of all by saying that they're bi. I hear more and more of people who because of homophobia have just chosen to say bi.' This can have a detrimental effect on bvisibility and the acceptance of bisexuality as a true orientation, as Pádraig highlighted:

But the fact that that happens for some people, doesn't define what bisexuality is and probably undermines the ability of people to identify as bi. LGBT organisations here recognise that understandably this cannot be used as a way of understanding bisexuality, which is an end in itself and not just a pathway.

Sometimes bisexuality is chosen as an identity for fear of how a straight spouse will react, as psychotherapist, Jeremy, noted:

In the earlier years, bisexuality was the name you gave to people who probably were gay, but were afraid to say so, because they were already married and their spouses couldn't have coped with them being gay, so they thought, and it was easier to say they were bisexual.

Others, however, do genuinely believe themselves to be bisexual for a period, at least.

Leonora, a Methodist Minister and Equalities Officer from Yorkshire, did initially identify as bisexual in her marriage to an opposite sex partner, only realising later, on embarking upon a same-sex relationship, that she was in fact lesbian:

I assumed I was bi. I met my husband at sixteen. There was no sex before marriage. I realised the physical stuff wasn't up to much but it was only when I had a female partner that I realised that I definitely wasn't bi. I didn't identify that way anymore. I wasn't with my husband out of sexual attraction.

However, Tracey, CEO of the national Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement, pointed to a tradition of gay and lesbian members of LGCM who have left opposite sex partners after many years of marriage, yet who have never identified as bisexual, despite being sexually active with both sexes: 'Lots of people would articulate that experience, but they wouldn't own the label bisexual, which is interesting.'

Catholic blogger, Terry, was one such person who fell into that category.

For Ruth, employed by the Church of England, bisexuality was more or less invisible as a category or topic of conversation. Speaking with reference to married Christians who leave their opposite sex partner for a gay partner, Ruth commented: 'I don't hear people talk about it. It's like it doesn't exist. People don't tend to use the phrase bisexuality. Usually the assumption is somebody thought they were straight, but actually they were gay.'

MCC Pastor, Gladys, even suggested bisexual as an orientation was dying, with 'queer' and 'gender fluid' proving more popular in everyday usage.

To conclude, participants pointed to a range of understandings of bisexuality, from simple attraction to people despite their gender, to sexual attraction to both men and women, whether cis- and non cisgendered. It was acknowledged that for some people, particularly in hostile, homohysterical<sup>124</sup> environments, bisexuality may be a transient identity used to mask a homosexual orientation, while for others, bisexuality was a genuine and lifelong orientation. Ruth pointed to a lack of discussion of bisexuality *per se*, which appears to be a thread running throughout this study, whilst Gladys felt the orientation was being replaced by more popular terms such as 'gender fluid', 'gender queer' or simply 'queer'. Clerical discomfort with non-binary systems, especially within traditional denominations, was also proposed as a reason for not acknowledging bisexual as an identity, an issue which will be covered later under bisexual erasure.

## **6.5 Pastoral Practice**

Chapter 4 *Bisexuality & The Church* revealed little acknowledgement of bisexual people within the pastoral policies and church resources of the major Christian denominations, let alone explicit advice on how to pastor them. One of the key aims of this research cell, therefore, was to ascertain which, if any, policies and resources were in place to support bisexual people and

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<sup>124</sup> See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homohysteria> which outlines Anderson's theory of Inclusive Masculinity and concepts of homohysteria

to monitor to what extent bisexual people were included in the congregations of churches through visible acknowledgement of their orientation.

To this end, I enquired of each participant whether they had ever seen any specifically bisexual literature in a church setting, and whether they had ever heard a sermon or small-group talk that focused on bisexuality.

Notably, not a single respondent had ever seen or produced any stand-alone information on bisexuality in their place of worship. Gladys, Senior Pastor of a Metropolitan Community Church in Tyne & Wear acknowledged:

... the literature that we produce at the local church around the Bible and sexuality is really about the Bible and homosexuality. It doesn't talk about bisexuals, nor does it talk about transgender issues. And certainly someone in the congregation has pointed that out to me, and was going to remedy that by helping me to amend the leaflet.

Shanon, another MCC pastor from London, spoke of the dearth of bisexual materials available to clergy seeking to offer pastoral support to bisexual congregants:

I still couldn't turn around to anybody – because I also train other people towards ordination – I couldn't turn around to any of my students and say, right, this is a book, this is a pamphlet, this is something that you really should be reading in order to offer pastoral care to people who identify as bisexual. And that is still so much the case. Without that information out there, it makes it very hard to be able to pastor people properly. It's no good handing them a leaflet on being gay. I'm sorry, but that's not good enough, because that's not what they just told you. Where do we find anything other than stuff that I would use for anybody about ethical behaviour, moral behaviours, when it comes to sexual practices? There's nothing that actually deals with things from a bisexual perspective in actually unpacking the Bible.

Shanon continued, 'While the letter B might be there, when you actually read the pamphlets, it's all about lesbian and gay.' She added: 'Trying to find anything that's been written theologically around bisexuality is like trying to find that needle in a haystack.'

Bisexuality was either subsumed within general equality and diversity literature, nominally included under the LGBT umbrella, or not mentioned at all. Belinda, an Anglican priest from Hampshire, told me that their church had produced 'an accessibility leaflet' and that 'the first

statement on there says that we are welcoming of all people, no matter what their disability or sexuality.’ Signing up to Inclusive Church<sup>125</sup> and using their logo was another means by which churches felt they were promoting an affirming ministry. Belinda continued: ‘Now we’ve put some leaflets with Inclusive Church on and at the moment we’ve got the Inclusive Church logo on our website... we try to be more explicit about it.’

I pointed out to Barbara, the Lancashire Convener of Outcome, that their own LGBT leaflet omitted to list bisexual people in its expansion of the LGBT abbreviation. She commented on this oversight: ‘Does it? That’s a Freudian slip, isn’t it?’

On the failure of the Lesbian and Gay Christian Movement to include bisexual people (or trans) in its organisation’s title, CEO Tracey Byrne acknowledged:

The title of the organisation certainly doesn’t imply that we speak to the bi experience. Our focus is on same sex relationships and some of the people who are in same sex relationships will primarily identify as being bi rather than being gay or lesbian. I’m very aware that one of the things I need to get better at doing is making clear that we understand that that story is a different one.

Of the situation in Northern Ireland, Pádraig commented that the hostile climate meant that:

... the idea of getting to the stage of being able to speak to specific sectors within the LGBT community is a luxury that we don’t actually have... because there is such generalised levels of misunderstanding and hatred or fear regarding the broad LGBT community.

Pádraig added, ‘you rarely see literature about LGBT people at all’ and the situation was no worse for bisexual people than for lesbian, gay or transgender individuals.

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<sup>125</sup> See <http://inclusive-church.org.uk/>

This organisation, started up in 2003, has as its statement of belief: ‘We believe in inclusive Church - church which does not discriminate, on any level, on grounds of economic power, gender, mental health, physical ability, race or sexuality. We believe in Church which welcomes and serves all people in the name of Jesus Christ; which is scripturally faithful; which seeks to proclaim the Gospel afresh for each generation; and which, in the power of the Holy Spirit, allows all people to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Jesus Christ.’

Matthew, a retired Anglican priest from Hampshire, noted that the only mention he had ever read of bisexuality within the Church of England was a negative one, namely that stated in the 1991 Bishop's Report, *Issues in Human Sexuality*, where bisexuality is dismissed in just one paragraph as involving adultery as a matter of course (See Chapter 4). This view was not representative of either the clergy or laity, in Matthew's opinion:

It's a document that's been elevated to a status it should never have had. It's been treated as if it's somehow definitive and it expresses THE Anglican opinion, whereas everybody who knows the Anglican Church, particularly the Church of England, knows that there is a whole host of opinions and positions.

For Terry, a Catholic, the lack of literature specifically relating to bisexuality was a problem across the board: 'I've been reading some fairly serious theology about how the churches can become more inclusive, and I haven't read anything about the church and bi issues, any church.'

This omission was echoed by Shanon, MCC Pastor from London (who does not identify as bisexual), who commented:

To put that into context, I was asked to write a chapter for a booklet coming from the Anglican Church on sexuality, from Inclusive Church, and they also asked me, did I know of any bisexuals who could write a chapter? Now, that is the denomination of the UK coming to me to ask me if I knew of any bisexuals who could write a chapter for their book on their personal experience of being bi because they didn't know anybody. That's how much it's ignored and brushed under the carpet and how much people who are bisexual feel that they cannot be open about it. There is not a space for them to come out.

My second question with regard to bivisibility focused on verbal inclusion of bisexuality within LGBT dialogue in churches. Had any of the participants heard bisexuality spoken of, either in sermons or small-group discussions in their places of worship?

Again, the answer was almost resoundingly negative with some exceptions. Gladys, MCC Pastor, stated that she had herself preached on bisexuality, and that bisexuality was discussed in a positive way within her denomination. Otherwise, people had only heard bisexuality spoken of outside of a church context at LGBT faith conferences, and even then, rarely.

Shanon, also a MCC pastor, commented that she had ‘attended an awful lot of conferences’ but that the only time she had heard bisexuality mentioned specifically was at a workshop led by myself (LGCM Annual Conference, London, May 2014). She added: ‘I cannot think of any other conference where bisexuality has been addressed in that way.’

Terry, a Catholic involved in Quest (LGBT Catholics) and Rainbow Catholics also stated that he had only heard bisexuality mentioned at a workshop led by myself (European Forum of LGBT Christian Groups, Gothenberg, May 2016) and at the World Meeting of the Global Network of Rainbow Catholics – again, not in a church setting. Otherwise, he had only heard bisexuality spoken of in private circles: ‘My exposure to bi issues has been purely in personal conversation with individuals that I’ve met and what I’ve read. All that I’ve read has been the kind of nasty stuff that you were railing against in your presentation.’

Barbara, a Methodist Minister, also stated that bisexuality had only come up in a private conversational context, whilst Lisa, a bisexual Anglican, responded: ‘It’s never been brought up by anyone but me and the very few comments I’ve heard about it have been in reaction to me and in reaction to things I’ve said.’ The reaction to her views, she describes as ‘mixed.’

Belinda, a non-stipendiary Anglican priest, commented that she had only ever heard bisexuality discussed in her secular place of work, and that particular occasion had been her first exposure to the orientation. Within her own ministry, she has attempted to be LGBT affirming by making characters in Bible stories non-straight and by using Stonewall No-Bystander posters, but so far these have focused on homosexual orientations (though, as Gladys notes, the Biblical stories of David and Jonathan or Ruth and Naomi could be used to focus on bisexuality).

Barbara also acknowledged that the LGBT Methodist group, Outcome, tended to focus on gay and lesbian issues: ‘I don’t know whether you would say that our programme over the last few years has offered anything specifically to someone who is bisexual... I’m guessing we’re not very good at putting things on that might attract bisexual people.’



In summary, only one church pastor had ever spoken specifically on bisexuality within a church context, otherwise people had only heard bisexuality mentioned at bespoke LGBT conferences or in private conversation. The lack of specific focus on bisexuality in spoken communications mirrors the lack of content in written documentation.

## **6.6 Motivation for Affirming Practice**

I was also interested in discovering what motivated pastors and supporters of bisexual people to engage in affirming practices. The responses to this question fell into three categories: experience of suffering; Biblical conviction and a commitment to social justice.

Matthew, a retired Anglican priest, stated:

From theological college onwards, I've been very much aware of just how much people, particularly people in the church, suffered, because of their sexuality... men who were at college with me, who were gay, and who had to lie or pretend or live lonely lives, and it just seemed to me at the time that their need and their capacity for love was being deliberately frozen by the institution of the church.

Belinda, another Anglican priest, spoke of the impact of the film *Pride*<sup>126</sup> on her decision to be an LGBT ally, both at church and her secular place of work. She also spoke of how the suicide of a young Christian man influenced her to speak out for equality.

Leonora, a Methodist Minister and Equalities Officer, felt a sense of spiritual conviction about being openly affirming of LGBT people: 'I see myself as the Church, letting them know that God affirms us. My role as EDI Officer is to make the church, the Methodist Church, fully inclusive.'

Nina, joint pastor of Liberty Church in Lancashire, spoke clearly of her husband's sense of calling to pastor the LGBT community in their locality:

My husband felt particularly called to start up a church that would especially serve the gay community. The Lord had spoken to him through the story of the woman at the

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<sup>126</sup> A British film from 2014 portraying an unlikely alliance between some gay and lesbian activists and a Welsh mining village during the pit closures of the Thatcherite era.

well in John's Gospel, when Jesus spoke to the woman who was despised by the religious establishment of the time and shunned by much of the village because of her sexual history. He felt the Lord was saying, there are still people who are despised by the religious establishment and I want to pick up those people.

Shanon, a MCC Senior Pastor, spoke of a need for community and social justice as motivating factors in her calling to pastor bisexual people, including bisexual women and bisexual asylum seekers:

I think human beings are designed with a need to belong. I believe in a Trinitarian God, which is a God that is community. We need to feel that we belong. And I think especially for bisexual women, they are excluded on so many levels.

Social justice was also key to Terry, a Catholic from Surrey. Speaking of his experiences of living with apartheid in South Africa, he commented:

Where there are unjust laws, God's law comes first. That was impressed upon me. Things like conscience is supreme. Catholics must be opposed to injustice. Catholics must reach out and support the oppressed and the marginalised, all that kind of thing. And slowly the penny began to drop. Hold on a second, if we've got to be involved with justice and inclusion and all that kind of good stuff, what about injustice inside the church? What about injustice towards women, what about injustice towards gay people?

Terry also spoke of a strong sense of calling. Of his international website, he stated, 'It was something I was called to do, I had no choice in the matter.' This has been at considerable personal cost to himself, being accused by some American readers of being 'the spawn of the devil', 'in league with Satan' and of being 'the Anti-Christ.'

Barbara of the Methodist Church has also suffered personal abuse but not let it deflect from her mission to spread an affirming message to the Church. She has been subject to hate crime, being labelled an 'abomination' amongst other things for speaking at a local church as an openly lesbian woman.

Pádraig set up his spiritual community in Northern Ireland in the 1980s to provide a safe space for LGBT people to hold meetings and retreats. The complex political and religious situation, as

well as the jurisdiction in Northern Ireland surrounding same-sex relationships, has made such communities vital in affirming LGBT Christians, amongst others.

## **6.7 Denominational Differences**

The next section considers the range in attitudes to bisexual people across the denominations represented in this study.

Sections 6.3.1 - 6.3.3 inclusive have already highlighted a distaste for acknowledging bisexuality within the established church in the UK, the Church of England. Ruth, who works for the Anglican Church, pointed to the damage done in this respect by the 1991 publication of *Issues in Human Sexuality*:

My experience of church is they've very invested in the gender binary, so they can't deal with anybody who is not clearly male or female. So a result of that is that they're very invested in heteronormativity. Anything in between, they just haven't got into thinking about that, apart from that awful document that the Church of England has made into doctrine, which was never meant to be, *Issues in Human Sexuality*. Just that assumption, that if you're bisexual, you have to be relating to men and women at the same time, which means you're therefore non-monogamous, which means you're therefore wrong. I mean, that's just so absurd.

For Ruth, it was external appearances that were key within the Church of England:

You might be [bi] in a heterosexual marriage... they won't ask any more questions, that will be fine. They're not questioning what's going on inside a person, they're just bothered about the outward manifestations.

This investment in the gender binary within the Anglican Church, at the expense of confronting the more complex truth, was made comically clear by Methodist Leonora, who was about to be ordained as an Anglican priest whilst married to a man. When she felt obliged to tell her bishop about her same-sex attraction prior to ordination, the bishop's advice was that 'she sat on her husband's knee every so often, so that he did not feel emasculated'! This statement also highlights the higher priority given to male sexuality in the Church of England.

Tracey of LGCM spoke of a reluctance among clergy in the Anglican Church to disclose their sexuality, for fear of repercussions (priests and bishops may not act on homosexual feelings): 'If you tell the truth, you can get into trouble. People are reluctant to report on their sexual identity.'

This was confirmed by Christian psychotherapist, Jeremy, who, referring to a Baptist bisexual he had recently counselled, commented: 'to get his salary each month, he needs to be a proper Baptist Minister who doesn't have the complexities of these things to muddy the water.' This 'don't ask, don't tell' mentality leads to large sways of homosexual or bisexual clergy remaining in the closet to this day.

Catholic teaching on sex and marriage precludes any discussion of bisexuality by the Catholic Church, too, in the view of Terry: 'It is a problem for the Catholic Church specifically, in that they really need to rethink their whole understanding of sex. It's not just about procreation, it's not even just about relationships.'

He further explained:

The difficult in terms of church teaching is that all of it is hooked into the assumption of permanent monogamous relationships, that there's no way to conceptualise a bisexual life, rather than a bisexual orientation. So I think it would take a huge long time... I think for them to start thinking seriously about bisexuality, they would then have to start thinking about relationships. Not necessarily physical sexual relationships, but at least relationships which are not necessarily within that marital bond, and that's a huge step too far for them, I think.

In terms of the Methodist Church, Barbara stated that the leadership was, on the whole, 'relaxed' about LGBT people, while the laity demonstrate a wide range of views. This is perhaps linked to the fact that local Methodist churches are free to determine their own interpretations of church doctrine in a way that Anglican churches are not. This leads to 'progressive pockets' of Methodist churches.

The way it works with Methodism, there are some churches that are particularly open and welcoming, and then there are other churches that are probably quite anti on a

whole raft of things, and that would include lesbians and gay men, bisexual people, trans people, queer people, gender non-conforming people.

This inconsistency was echoed by another Methodist Minister, Leonora:

It's very affirming, as far as it can be, certainly in the hierarchy. It's patchy in some circuits; some of my colleagues who are LGBT find it very difficult. My experience now with our new chair is very affirming. It varies where you are.

Shanon of MCC felt her church was entirely affirming of bisexual people, of all backgrounds:

The ethos of MCC is very clearly one of inclusion and God's love for all. And whilst other denominations say that, it always feels to me like there's some small print. Currently in my church, I have quite a number of people identify as bisexual, because I have a large Ugandan population seeking asylum, and quite a few of them identify as bisexual as well.

Gladys, also of MCC, had a number of bisexual identified congregants at her church, who were all well integrated and comfortable with their identity. Liberty Church, Lancashire, the other LGBT affirming church in this study alongside MCC, was also entirely accepting of bisexual people; Pastor Nina spoke of the need to offer 'bucket loads and shed loads of acceptance' towards them, 'because life is complicated.'

Shanon of MCC felt that the lack of clergy training and literature available on bisexuality was a core reason behind the inability of most denominations, including her own, to effectively pastor bisexual people, or indeed partners of bisexual people:

I know very well that for some people who identify as bisexual and they've shared that with a pastor, it's almost like, let's move on, you know, let's not talk about that. We'll move on, because they just feel so terribly out of their depth, and don't have anything to say, because they've never had a chance to talk about it with anyone else, they've not done any training on it, there's nothing they can even read... when it comes to relationship counselling from a pastoral perspective, there's all of those sorts of issues as well, and there's nothing out there. You pretty much make it up as you go along, trying to adapt what is there for either heterosexual or homosexual relationships, to actually accommodate a bisexual.

## **6.8 Relationship Configurations**

Following on from denominational differences in terms of the support offered bisexual people, I also explored how each denomination represented would react to non-traditional relationship configurations. Non-traditional here referred to both non-monogamy and polyamory.

Whilst the assumption cannot be made that all bisexual people engage in polyamorous relationships, and indeed, such presumptions are damaging to bisexual credibility, it was clear from the responses from individual bisexuals in both the UK and US research studies, that some bisexual Christians do indeed practise polyamory. A common example of this would be where a bisexual person takes a secondary partner of a different gender from their primary partner, to express both sides of their sexual orientation.

Shanon of MCC took a non-directive attitude towards non-monogamy and polyamory, stating that it was between the individual and their conscience before God. Regarding polyamory, Nina of Liberty Church stated her own personal views on non-monogamy a little more clearly, but similarly attempted to support congregants in making their own conscious-based choices:

Our stance is very much about the grace of God and respecting where an individual is at, both sexually and ethically. So somebody who was in multiple relationships – we wouldn't interfere with that. I guess we would accept that person and walk with them as they work out their way through life. We should respect the individuals to make their own decision on things, even if those decisions we perhaps think are wrong. If that's right for that person, then we support that person.

In terms of primary and secondary relationships for bisexual people, I asked Nina whether that would be accepted at Liberty Church:

Absolutely we would respect them and we'd just accept they were doing the best they could in the situation they've found themselves in. The only times we do intervene is if we see bullying or abuse in a relationship – we would confront that.

This mirrors Carter Heyward's concept of mutuality and power balance in relationships (Heyward, 1989). I also questioned Gladys from MCC in Tyne & Wear about her views on polyamory for bisexual people. Gladys commented:

I think that's a matter for the private individuals to negotiate. I think it's curious that we celebrate the uniqueness of God's creation... but then suddenly we're all expected to worship in the same way, like the same hymns, interpret Scripture the same way and love in the same way... What I would look for in a Christian is moral maturity. And having a relationship where you are telling your partner that you're being monogamous, but actually you are having a separate relationship with someone else and not telling your partner, that isn't morally mature, that's being deceitful and potentially very hurtful. If you have people who are in relationships that are polyamorous and those are consensual relationships where people have discussed their parameters and their boundaries and how to protect each other in appropriate ways, then I think that's not for everyone, but I think that's a morally more mature way of living.

Retired Anglican priest, Matthew, shared Gladys' views on polyamory and the importance of consent and honesty.

I think those for whom a non-monogamous relationship can work is probably a minority, but I don't think it needs to be. I think if there is honesty and openness and trust, yes, then I think non-monogamous relations can work and can be seen as ethically sound. I think the basis for all sexual ethics is consent, to make sure that it is not manipulative, that there isn't a kind of power imbalance.

However, another Anglican priest, Belinda, did not share this view. Whilst she had no problem with same-sex relationships, or sequential relationships with different gendered partners for bisexual people, Belinda did not feel that concurrent sexual relationships were an option for a Christian, conceding that she 'would find that more difficult' and that it 'wouldn't fall within my bands of acceptability as such.' She added:

Commitment for me is a very important part of that couple's relationship. I think the same things, you know, with a heterosexual couple. If somebody was attracted to somebody else, I wouldn't see sex outside of that relationship as part of what I would accept.

Academic Lisa, another Anglican though not ordained, had no issues with polyamory and acknowledged a polyamorous past. She pointed out the hardships faced by polyamorous people and the need to support both primary and secondary partners in polyamorous configurations. She also highlighted the prejudices polyamorous females experienced compared to their male counterparts:

I think it's really hard socially, it's very stigmatised. I think people who do it long term seriously believe in it and make a lot of sacrifices for it... I support it and I also think people in polyamorous relationships need support and understanding and that's from everyone around them. I think it's something that people need to think through carefully if they're deciding to be in polyamorous relationships long-term... I also think for bisexual people, there seems to be a little bit of double standards going on. I'm informed by a psychotherapist friend of mine that it is becoming more common for bisexual men to be in relationships with women, to have a boyfriend as well... but I'm not aware that there is growing social acceptance for women, and that men's sexuality is more important and stronger than women's sexuality, so double standards.

Lisa also cast doubt on whether long-term monogamy was always helpful for some people.

Terry, a Catholic, spoke of the value of sex in itself, irrespective of whether it took place within a monogamous relationship or not, so long as there was mutual trust present:

Good, healthy, moral sex is not only about permanent relationships. I'm not proposing living a life of constant one night stands, but there are times when it's valuable. I think the Catholic Church needs to completely change its whole understanding of sexuality, to embrace not only the idea that relationships can be other than opposite sex for the purpose of children, and can include same sex relationships. But sometimes these relationships are not long term, enduring relationships, but they can be brief and fleeting, so long as they are entered into on the basis of responsibility and trust. And they've got to go through all of that before I think that they can really embrace bisexuality issues.

Secular psychotherapist, Grant, who is affirming of polyamory, expressed similar sentiments in discussing a recent conference of the Gay Christian Movement:

One of them was talking about... affirming casual sex. It's the first time I'd heard someone who came at it from a sort of theological and sort of ethical view. But he said it's about care and connection and that care and connection can be very quick with someone.

## **6.9 Mental Health**

As Chapter 3 explored, statistics consistently show bisexual people to have worse mental health than their gay and lesbian counterparts. I was therefore interested to see in this chapter whether such statistics matched the experience of those who pastor and support bisexual



people, and what they adjudge to be the potential contributory factors to this unfavourable diagnosis.

Anglican priest, Belinda, who confessed to limited exposure to bisexual people, believed it was to do with a sense of difference, and of not being 'normal':

I think when you are different in any sort of way, and you know that you are going to be judged by people or mocked, I think that's a very difficult thing to live with. It affects your well-being and your mental health.

MCC Pastor Gladys felt that the mental health issues were manifold for bisexual people. Firstly, there was an internal tension with ambiguity, which is not experienced by the more clear-cut discovery that one is homosexual:

I think for people who are bisexual, they have to go through that discussion of 'am I heterosexual, am I lesbian or gay' and then discovering that attraction to both sexes is possible and enjoyable - and even within the constraints of what they might have been taught by society or their own religion, this feels a natural part of them. So there's that internal discovery. I think human beings by and large aren't comfortable with ambiguity, so it's the sense of the ambiguity of being bisexual, if you like, or the lack of boundary-ness of this.

Secondly, Gladys felt that the often adverse reaction of both the heterosexual and homosexual community towards bisexual people contributes to poor mental health:

Very much the second bit, is how that plays out in the wider context. So within the LGBT community and in heterosexual society, by and large bisexuals have not been given a good reception.... Overall, there's this sense of tension about 'bisexuals can't make up their mind' or they're promiscuous, or they are lesbian or gay people who are hiding and they use the bisexuality thing as a ruse. So to have that, when you're making these internal discoveries and trying to be comfortable in yourself, to discover that actually you may not be welcome where you thought you'd be welcome, actually both of those are quite big things to get your head around. So you know, I can understand why having that level of distress would be prevalent within bisexual folk, or some bisexual folk.

Psychotherapist Grant spoke of the overwhelming sense of isolation most bisexual clients spoke of, particularly men:

I've certainly had clients who feel very isolated. They sort of are aware of their feelings, quite upset by them. I think their overwhelming feeling is sort of fear and isolation. Particularly this is for men... I had one guy say to me, he'd never met another bi person... he was presenting sort of anxious, scared, not really wanting to be there, difficult thing to say to somebody sort of thing.

Grant noted that gay men did not generally have the same sense of shame around their sexuality and were more confident in themselves. In line with Gladys' comments, Grant also felt that a lack of support from potential sources of community had a detrimental effect on bisexual wellbeing:

I think it's the lack of support, or being rejected by those who you think might support you... I suspect if you go to one of the few places where you think you'd want to be seen as attractive or as a friend or supported or whatever, and you go to a LGBT style thing and it's not bi friendly, then I think that's actively disappointing.

A desire to 'fit in' and the inability to speak of bisexuality in church circles causes many bisexual Christians to assume a monosexual identity, according to Christian psychotherapist, Jeremy:

I'm quite sure that there are a great many bisexual people out there, but because of the difficulty of talking about it at church, they would rather align themselves with gay or straight, preferably straight, because that's the simplest, and less likely to cause them problems.

Jeremy stated that it has been fear of judgement that has caused both gay and bisexual Christians historically to (mis) identify as straight and choose heterosexual marriages that have often broken down:

There was one area that everybody would bless them in, another area which would be absolutely forbidden and taboo. And I think when you're having to interpret your own feelings in those very black and white terms, then you will try to interpret them for yourself as positively, something that people will affirm, rather than allow yourself to go near thinking about feelings which are suspect, which you don't understand yourself really.

Jeremy also cited isolation as a key factor in poor mental health:

I think wherever anybody is unable to speak about their situation and articulate it, and have a small, at least a small number of friends who can walk with them and journey, I

think you end becoming like a pressure cooker, where you feel like exploding, you just can't cope. A lack of those sort of non-judgmental friends makes for a very, very depressing and difficult situation.

We saw under 6.3.4 Denominational Differences, how binary thinking in the Church of England and other conservative traditions poses a problem for those who do not identify as heteronormative. Ruth commented on how the Anglican Church was really only interested in outward appearances and this simplistic, a-spiritual stance was confirmed by Jeremy:

They only think of whether or not you fit into their behaviour models, which means that maybe for a teenager, that would be alright, but for a mature adult, you've got to be able to move way beyond there... I think all problems for bisexual people and the depression caused for spouses of gay people, and all these groups, they all come of the fact that none of us can live within a spiritual life context where it's just sort of black and white thinking. It's a killer. It's like a kind of cancer in the spiritual life, it constantly corrodes and corrupts and sabotages spiritual growth, because we all need that freedom to come to understand who we are, be free to express it, speak about it, and learn by expressing it. We don't learn from a book.

Jeremy also spoke of flippancy and dismissive comments towards bisexual people in a church context:

'Oh well, they just can't make up their minds' – which is one of the most cheap, vulgar kind of judgments people make, but often made in complete ignorance of sexuality. And of course, what it does to people is it just shuts them down, and just means that they know then that church is not a safe space to speak.

As Ruth pointed out, it is perhaps more the case that monosexual people feel the need to make up their minds about bisexual people and require sexuality to be static for their own sense of equilibrium: 'I think there is clearly pressure to be one thing or another from the straight community and the gay and lesbian community, because people like to know what you are and that that's not going to change.'

Methodist Minister Barbara also spoke of dismissive attitudes towards bisexual people:

I think there's an idea that people want to sleep with women and men at the same time, or they can't make up their mind, or just want to have their cake and eat it, really

they're straight and they're just experimenting... I've heard lots of people be dismissive in that way and not really listen to what someone might be saying.

Bi academic Lisa spoke of Meyer's Minority Stress Theory with regard to bisexual mental health:

When you're in a minority, you're in an inherently stressful position in society and – human nature being what it is – subject to bullying and depression. And that's certainly the case with bisexual people, more than lesbian women and gay men in my experience, plus the dynamics of race and ability perpetuate that.

Lisa added that she had made a decision not to be out as bi in the workplace at this point in time, owing to the 'mental assassination' that would take place once she went public about her sexuality, a sense of vulnerability as a bisexual person not experienced by those with more widely accepted and clearly defined sexual preferences.

This minority stress has a negative effect on self-perception and identity, as Ruth from the Church of England highlighted:

What is it that compromises your mental health? It's a sense of either uncertainty, threat to, rejection of who you believe yourself to be, and uncertainty yourself about who you believe yourself to be. And all of these things are particularly at work if you don't feel you fit other people's categories. So if you don't fit the dominant category, that's tough. And if you then feel you don't fit the minority category that's been created because of the dominant category, then you potentially end up feeling you're just marginal, you don't fit in anywhere. And bisexuality is just one way in which that manifests itself.

Shanon also touched on the additional problems faced by intersectional identities, such as bisexual women and black and minority ethnicities (BME), in terms of isolation and lack of community:

I think especially for bisexual women, they are excluded on so many levels. They're excluded because of their gender as women. They're then excluded from the lesbian community because 'you fancy men as well, we can't have you in here.' You're excluded from the heterosexual community because you have an attraction to women. So whatever way they turn, they don't quite belong, they don't quite fit. They can't quite follow this or that conversation or that way of living and being or whatever. So they never, ever really feel at home, they never really feel that they've got a place. And

I think that is what causes that problem. There's so much pressure then, where do you go? And if you did find someone else who is bisexual, it doesn't mean you're actually going to relate to them on any other level, just because you have the same sexual orientation.

With specific reference to BME bisexuals, Shanon added:

We [western missionaries] have beaten the BME community over the head with the fact that the only relationship you should have is with one man and one woman for life, and now that's what they hold onto, and therefore to be anything other than that - and especially in the UK, being BME means you're already in a minority group - you're already facing various forms of persecution, discrimination, oppression...

Terry explained poor bisexual mental health as potentially resulting from the tension of trying to exist in a monosexual, monogamist society:

Coming out as gay is not easy and you've got to learn how to function... if you then set up a relationship, you have a partnership and that partnership is a gay partnership. But how do you have a bi partnership? Within a social structure which is based on partnership and monogamy and permanent partnerships, there is a tension there, in how do you actually express both parts of a bi orientation?

Nina, a family therapist as well as a pastor, spoke of internalised biphobia and the double rejection bisexuals face from straight and gay communities alike, as well as a great sense of guilt. When questioned on the potential causes of anxiety and depression among bisexual Christians, Nina replied:

Poor self-esteem due to internalising other people's attitudes towards bisexuality. I think bisexual Christians get a double whammy from straight and gay people. Gay people who say 'oh you're only saying you're bisexual and you mean you're greedy.' I see that comment in the community quite commonly – so a total misunderstanding of bisexuality. And also the guilt stuff, you know, that this would come from Christians.

## **6.10 Bisexual Erasure**

Closely linked and interwoven with poor bisexual mental health (6.3.6) and Denominational Differences (6.3.4) was the invisibility or erasure of bisexual experience from church life in the UK.

Shanon of MCC was particularly outspoken on the so-called 'Silent B' in LGBT, which was tied up with a human need for binary constructs:

We use this acronym of LGBT, but the B is incredibly silent. It's almost like it's just there to fill a gap and most bisexuals are overlooked. It's almost like, well, if they happen to be with a same sex partner, that's fine because now they fit into the L or the G section; if they're with an opposite sex partner, well they don't really belong with us, so we'll just ignore them. So people haven't really wanted to deal with bisexuality as an identity and as a construct in its own right, and that I find both distressing and it makes me angry, because it's just as important an identity as any other identity and consequently we should value it in exactly the same way.

For Methodist Minister, Barbara, bisexuals do not attend many LGBT events because they assume 'it's really about gay people,' creating a potential vicious circle of bi-invisibility. In a similar vein, Tracey of LGCM commented that only a couple of self-identified bisexual people were members of the Lesbian & Gay Christian Movement – the name of which does not suggest bisexual inclusion and therefore does not serve to encourage bisexual people to join.

On a different tack, retired Anglican priest Matthew described bisexuality as an even 'hotter potato' for the Church of England than homosexuality and suggested it was sometimes the clergy's own personal fear of sexual ambiguity that prevented them from confronting bisexuality as a genuine sexual orientation – a point raised by Adrian Thatcher in *Liberating Sex* (Thatcher, 1993). Matthew comments: 'Probably a great many clergy recognise, are aware of their own bisexuality, [and] would be quite capable of enjoying going with another man, but terrified of the thought.'

Matthew also felt that the Church of England had an obsession with genital sex that blinded them to more nuanced conversations around human sexuality: 'I think that the Church has still got miles and miles to travel to get away from a sort of obsession over genitals and what you do with them.'

Belinda, another Anglican priest, felt the problem was more an obsession with 'deviant' sexualities: 'I think at the end of the day, people are human beings and it's getting to know the

human being, because our sexuality isn't the only defining factor... unfortunately the Church tends to concentrate on what they would call deviance.'

Gladys pointed out that bisexual people are often defined by their current relationship, presenting as homosexual if in a same-sex relationship or heterosexual if in an opposite sex one. This decreased bi-visibility in church circles and beyond. On the other hand, many bisexuals chose to adopt gay or straight identities, owing to the difficulty of being accepted as bisexual in church settings. This also reduced bisexual visibility.

As Jeremy commented:

I'm quite sure that there are a great many bisexual people out there, but because of the difficulty of talking about it at church, they would rather align themselves with gay or straight, preferably straight, because that's the simplest and less likely to cause them problems.

Grant pointed to the lack of bisexual role models in popular culture as another form of bi erasure that did little to enhance the bisexual orientation – though this was not specific to church circles. For Pádraig, bi visibility was no more or no less in Northern Ireland than any other sexual minority, so taboo was LGBT as a topic of discussion.

### **6.11 Bisexual Communities**

Despite the widespread silence reported on all matters bisexual in the church at large, there were signs of links being forged between churches and bisexual organisations. Nina of Liberty Church spoke of joining forces with Biphoria<sup>127</sup> at a local pride event and having put bisexual people in her own congregation in touch with this Manchester based organisation. Gladys spoke of links between her church and a local sexual health organisation in the North East that supported gay and bisexual men. Pádraig's retreat community offered a space for bisexual Christians to find acceptance and community, despite the lack of bespoke bisexual support groups in Northern Ireland.

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<sup>127</sup> See <http://www.biphoria.org.uk/>

Shanon of MCC was the most positive about bisexual community at her church, commenting: 'Our bisexual people do have a place, do feel at home, aren't suffering from those issues. But this is unfortunately so much the reality for other people. And it needs to change.'

### **6.12 Social Change**

However, there were also positive signs of social change and acceptance of 'middle sexualities', particularly among the younger generations attending church. Matthew commented: 'Things which were unspeakable and shameful to my parent' generation are accepted and regarded as just part of the rich mix of human sexuality.' Himself of pensionable age, Matthew now felt able to acknowledge occasional same-sex feelings, where previously that would have been taboo. He believed many more clergy harboured similar inclinations, if they were entirely honest with themselves.

Belinda also felt that people in her congregation were becoming more welcoming of diversity, and those who disapproved were silent on the subject, rather than vocal, suggesting they sensed they were now in the minority.

Gladys spoke of the openness with which young people used terminology such as 'gender queer' and 'gender fluid' both in church circles and beyond.

### **6.13 Positive Experiences of Being Bisexual**

Despite the overwhelming silence on bisexuality and bisexual issues in the church as a whole, some positive experiences of being bisexual were reported among the participants in Research Cell 1.

Gladys commented that the bisexual Christians in her congregation did not appear to be struggling with their sexual identity, and indeed that other issues were more pressing in their lives than their bisexual orientation.



Lisa spoke of the strength inherent in a bisexual identity and the bisexual experience in general:

The experience of being bisexual gives me a model for synthesizing, for relating other seemingly opposing things in other areas of my life, politically, spiritually, theologically, socially. I think I have less problems with the idea that diversity is a source of strength. It's part of being human. Show me an ecosystem that has only one species. It's just a nonsense. It makes me cross and upset and confused that people should want to make life narrower, more mono dimensional. For people could be grappling with the diversity and become fuller, more stable, more interesting people and live more interesting lives. I think there's a fundamental part of a bisexual philosophy which is about enfranchisement of a real root human experience, and this is something all the writers, artists, and social leaders who inspire me do. It's a pluralistic vision and that's the strength of it.

#### **6.14 Conclusion**

The aim of this chapter was to consider what support was available for bisexual Christians within a range of church traditions in the UK, through speaking to pastors and educators of bisexual people. It emerged that there was a distinct lack of attention paid to bisexuality, either in written or spoken media or in terms of pastoral support, which would appear to have a detrimental effect on bisexual people.

There appeared to be a general lack of understanding on the nature of bisexuality, as well as an unwillingness to acquire such understanding, from both clergy and laity alike, potentially causing bisexual Christians to feel isolated and misunderstood.

As Shanon of MCC sums up, regarding the bisexual issue:

Good resources need to be out there, bisexuality needs to be in the training manuals for all people looking to be ordained, regardless of denomination or faith. There just needs to be so much more education and understanding. And also to create spaces where people are free to be honest about who they are.

The next chapter, *Bisexual Christians in the UK*, will demonstrate what spaces, if any, bisexual people have found to express their identity inside church and to assess what additional measures are required to make church a more inclusive environment for bisexual Christians. It

will consider whether, indeed, the mental health and wellbeing of bisexual people is compromised by the attitude of the church towards the bisexual orientation.

## CHAPTER 7

### Bisexual Christians in the UK

This chapter and Chapter 8: *Bisexual Christians and Church Life in the UK* contain findings from my research with bisexual Christians in the UK, located within Research Cell 2. Following on from *Chapter 6: Bi-Affirming Pastors and Educators in the UK*, in this and subsequent chapters I consider to what extent bisexual people of faith feel included and upheld by their chosen denomination. Do these findings confirm or contradict the information shared by their pastors and educators?

Chapter 7 looks at concepts of faith and sexuality, and how the two interact in the lives of participants. Particular attention is paid to participants' readings of Scripture and how biblical passages do or do not support a positive bisexual identity. The complexities of living with the bisexual, Christian intersection are discussed, both with respect to relationship configurations and mental health. The lived experiences of participants in church per denomination is covered in Chapter 8, as are experiences within the LGBT faith community as a whole. In order to let participants' voices 'speak for themselves', I have elected in this chapter and in Chapters 8-12, to reserve critical analysis to Chapter 13: *Discussion and Concluding Thoughts*.

#### 7.1 Research Cell 2 (RC2) Participants

As with RC1, I sought to cover a range of ages and geographical locations, to ensure generational and regional variations were accounted for. As interviewees were not, on the whole, public figures with an existing ministry or practice, they were given pseudonyms of their choice (or selected by myself, where no preference was expressed). A few participants were willing to use their own name, however I elected to give them a pseudonym to ensure uniformity and to protect them from unforeseen adverse consequences, as some were in positions of leadership within the church. Further details of my research methodology can be found in **Chapter 5** and the list of prepared questions for participants in RC2 & 4 can be found in **Appendix 3**. The table overleaf lists the participants in RC1.

As with RC1, certain issues began to emerge as I coded initial interviews, which prompted me to digress at times from the original list of questions in order to address these emergent areas. Participants were recruited from a range of sources over a six month period, from February to August 2016. A large majority were sourced via Twitter, with several snowball effects occurring through this medium. I also made use of existing personal contacts from my locality and place of employment, as well as contacting LGBT affirming church leaders and faith organisations for potential interviewees. There was a great deal of enthusiasm for the project among the bisexual Christian community, and the number of participants greatly exceeded my initial target of ten. However, I decided to interview all bisexual Christians who made contact, to enhance the viability of the project, rejecting only those who were either underage or who had no experience of attending church in the UK, or partaking in LGBT faith activism in the UK. Interviews ranged from quick interviews undertaken in participants' lunchbreaks (<30 minutes) to lengthy evening interviews of up to 90 minutes. The average interview was around the 40 minute mark.

As noted in the Methodology chapter, I created a short Survey Monkey questionnaire online prior to conducting the main interviews which would form the basis of this project. This was to gauge interest and to try out some questions. This did not prove very successful, but did yield four responses from UK bisexual Christians. Their answers are found in **Appendix 4**, along with the survey questions and responses from US participants ( $n=8$ ).

## **7.2 Participant Demographics**

Whilst all participants resided in England at the point of interview, there were representatives of Scottish ( $n=3$ ), Welsh ( $n=1$ ) and Northern Irish ( $n=1$ ) descent as well as dual nationalities from continental Europe ( $n=3$ ) and Asia ( $n=1$ ). One interviewee had dual US/Italian nationality but had married and resided in the UK for some time. All participants had experience of identifying as bisexual within a church environment in the UK in line with project criteria.

All participants bar one were Caucasian, with one participant of Anglo-Indian descent. Attempts were made to recruit BME interviewees by contacting organisations such as *Bis of Colour* but to no avail (whether the enhanced stigma surrounding bisexuality in the BME community made BME bisexual Christians more reluctant to come forward would be speculative). All participants identified as bisexual, except one, who now identified as lesbian

but had previously identified as bisexual in a church setting and therefore matched the person spec. Two participants also identified as transgender and one as gender queer, alongside bisexual. In total, I interviewed 7 cis-gendered bisexual males, 17 cis-gendered bisexual females, 1 cis-gendered lesbian, 1 FTM and 1 MTF bisexual transsexual and 1 Gender Queer (biologically male) participant. The youngest respondent was aged 21 and the eldest 62, and the mean average age was 38.

In terms of employment, interviewees ranged from professionals and academics to administrators and semi-skilled workers. All self-identified as Christian except Susannah, who now identified as atheist, Demi, who practised Buddhism, and Corinne, who described herself as 'not Christian.' However, all three had previously engaged with Christianity and had attended mainstream denominations, thus fitting the person specification for the study.

Initial and detailed coding of transcription manuscripts revealed the following categories and sub-categories and it is these categories which formed the basis of this chapter and Chapter 8: *Bisexual Christians and Church Life in the UK*. The relevant chapters and sub-sections are highlighted in brackets in **Table 7.2** (overleaf).

### 7.3 Conceptualisation of Bisexuality

As per Chapter 6, *Bi-Affirming Pastors & Educators in the UK*, a range of responses were given to the question, what do you understand by bisexuality?

Jane cited the definition provided by bisexual activist, Robyn Ochs, featured in Chapter 8, namely:

I call myself bisexual because I acknowledge that I have in myself the potential to be attracted – romantically and/or sexually – to people of more than one sex and/or gender, not necessarily at the same time, not necessarily in the same way, and not necessarily to the same degree.<sup>128</sup>

Along similar lines, Adele replied: 'I guess I'd say romantic and/or attraction to more than one gender.'

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<sup>128</sup> See <https://robynochs.com/quotes/>

Table 7.1: RC2 Bisexual Christians in the UK

	Name	Profession	Age	Interview Format	Denomination
201	Robyn (F)	Retired Civil Servant, London	62	Face to Face	Anglican
202	Sandra (F)	Civil Servant, South Yorkshire	53	Telephone	Anglican
203	Jane (F)	Charity Worker, London	55	Telephone	Anglican
204	Cat (F)	Ordinand, London	25	Questionnaire	Anglican
205	Moiria (F)	Academic, London	49	Skype Audio	Anglican
206	Naomi (F)	Medical Professional, Lancashire	56	Telephone	Free Church
207	Amelia (F)	Engineer, Greater Manchester	35	Telephone	Ex Baptist
208	Adele (F)	Union Official, Cambridgeshire	30	Telephone	Anglican
209	Susannah (F)	Freelance Worker, West	36	Skype Video	Ex Baptist
210	Gillian (F)	Academic, London	43	Questionnaire	MCC
211	Kathryn (F)	Medical Practitioner, W.Yorkshire	31	Telephone	Anglican
212	Maria (F)	Student, West Midlands	21	Face to Face	Mormon
213	Elena (F)	Charity Worker, London	31	Face to Face	Catholic
214	Ali (GQM)	Ordinand, Co. Durham	29	Skype Video	Anglican
215	Judy (F)	Charity Worker, Tyne & Wear	30	Telephone	MCC
216	Claudia (F)	Journalist, Leicestershire	27	Questionnaire	Online Church
217	Ravenna (F)	Charity Worker, Gloucestershire	38	Face to Face	Anglican
218	Justin (M)	Student, West Yorkshire	21	Telephone	Anglican
219	Johnny (M)	Childcare Practitioner,	27	Skype Video	Non-Denomin.
220	Harry (M)	Academic, London	34	Questionnaire	Anglican
221	Laurence (M)	Academic, Cambridgeshire	37	Telephone	Anglican
222	Chris (M)	Retired, Lancashire	60	Questionnaire	Free Church
223	Stephen (M)	Academic, London	34	Telephone	Anglican
224	Frannie (F)	Hair Stylist, Hampshire	35	Face to Face	Anglican
225	Demi (F)	Academic, London	40	Telephone	Buddhist
226	Corinne (F)	Teacher & Academic,	41	Face to Face	Unaffiliated
227	Giles (M)	Retired schoolteacher,	57	Skype Video	Catholic
228	Tristan (M)	Library Intern, Hampshire	21	Face to Face	Evangelical

Table 7.2: Coding Categories & Sub-Categories for RC2

Main Category	Sub Category
Bisexual Christians in the UK (7)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Research Cell Participants (7.1)</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participant Demographics (7.2)</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conceptualisation of Bisexuality (7.3)</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Self-Actualisation (7.4)</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bisexuality &amp; Scripture (7.5)</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Relationship configurations (7.6)</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bivisibility within the LGBT faith community (7.7)</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bisexual Mental Health (7.7)</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conclusion (7.8)</li> </ul>
Bisexual Christians and Church Life in the UK (8)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bivisibility within the LGBT faith community (8.1)</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bivisibility in churches per denomination (8.2)</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Church Experiences (8.3)</li> <li>Negative experiences (8.3.1)</li> <li>Positive experiences (8.3.2)</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Into the future (8.4)</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conclusion (8.5)</li> </ul>

Moira commented:

I'd say it's somebody who can be attracted to men or women; anything else about what that means in terms of stable relationships, etc., is an additional question.

Bisexual itself is just about having an attraction in both directions.

Moira went on to describe bisexuality as 'a broad spectrum' and 'a broad church,' making it difficult to arrive at a definitive answer.

Naomi felt the fluidity of both her gender and her sexuality led to a certain degree of uncertainty surrounding self-identity:

Do you feel masculine or feminine and does it move it around? .... Sometimes it can be very irritating, because you can go through a whole phase where there's no woman you find attractive at all. And you know, was I completely wrong about this? ...In the beginning, I would say it was completely the opposite way round. So where I am on the so-called Kinsey Spectrum varies and changes.

Both Stephen and Susannah favoured the popular current definition championed by the Bisexual Index among others, that bisexuality is attraction to more than one gender.<sup>129</sup>

Susannah did express some reservations about the term bisexual, but still felt able to own it as an identity:

Bisexual does sound more sort of science-y and clinical than gay or lesbian. In the same way, we don't refer to them as homosexual because it sounds a bit arch and formal and it's the way that people were referred to in laws and psychiatry textbooks in the last 100, 200 years. Bisexual, just because it fits the pattern of homosexual, heterosexual, can sound a bit like that. But I've always owned it, ever since I used it for myself since the age of about 15.

Maria saw a bisexual as 'someone who's attracted to at least two genders - any genders.' But Ali limited bisexual to 'being sexually attracted to male and female' and felt pansexual more accurately reflected an attraction to non cis-gendered individuals. Elena defined bisexuality as 'being attracted in the same way to men and women' and Johnny spoke of it terms of being 'attracted to both genders,' also suggesting a gender binary.

Distinguishing between pansexual and bisexual proved problematic and contentious for a number of those interviewed, who all identified as bisexual as a condition of the study. Both Tristan and Susannah agreed that pansexual meant gender was irrelevant, while for bisexual people gender mattered. Susannah commented: 'Bisexual means attracted to people of more than one gender... pansexual means attracted to people rather than gender.'

Along similar lines, Tristan stated:

My understanding is... bisexuality is you're attracted to all genders, while pansexuality is regardless of gender. They sound very similar... but how I understand it is bisexuality has gender as a sort of criteria, while pansexuality doesn't even have that as a field... it removes it completely.

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<sup>129</sup> See <http://www.bisexualindex.org.uk/index.php/Definitions>



Kathryn emphasised that bisexuality was about attraction to both cis-gendered and non cis-gendered individuals, and not just to biologically male and female persons:

I get very frustrated... when someone who's pansexual says bisexuality is somebody who's attracted to men and women. But for me, and for many other people, it's not about the binary. It's more than one gender... since when do trans people not count as men and women?

Ravenna agreed with Kathryn, indicating a certain degree of conflation existed between within the terminology: 'For me, it's [bisexuality] being attracted to a person, regardless of their gender, gender expression or gender identity. And I realise that's a little bit stretching into what's become known as pansexual.' This, in Ravenna's view, did not make her gender fluid, though she did acknowledge the complexity of defining middle sexualities:

I think it's where gender and sexuality.... [where] the waters get a little muddied, because I myself am cis-gendered. You know, I'm female. But a person that I would be attracted to... their gender or their gender identity or their gender expression doesn't make a difference. So it would be very feasible to be in a relationship with a transgender person, but it doesn't make me gender fluid.

Naomi, whilst expressing a degree of gender fluidity which Ravenna did not, did emphasise the individual above gender as a key factor in physical attraction: 'It's not a question of being attracted to all guys and all girls, it's particular people.'

#### **7.4 Self-actualisation**

This subcategory considers how participants arrived at an understanding of their bisexuality and the process of coming to terms with and claiming this identity for themselves.

Robyn just spoke about 'feeling different' from a very young age. As sexuality was not something that was ever discussed by her family or in social circles of that time, she did not attach the label bisexual to these feelings until much later on:

I think I probably always knew that I wasn't the same as everybody else, right from a very young age, quite small. Probably four or five. Really, really early I knew that I wasn't the same. I guess when I was growing up... there was even less discussion about homosexuality of any sort... When I was younger, I always thought that I was more lesbian than bi, because I think probably the male part of me is slightly more dominant than the female part... but I think as I grew older, I began to realise that wasn't necessarily where I was at. Which made it even more confusing.

Another older respondent, Sandra, expressed a similar sense of confusion over sexual identity that took some time to resolve:

I've always felt comfortable with it, but what I didn't have when I was much younger, was the word for it. The whole problem was, was I a lesbian or-? I think bi wasn't really on the agenda. So it took me really a while to get to the point of thinking 'oh, that's who I am.'

Maria also communicated a difficulty in establishing whether she was lesbian or bisexual: 'I've always been comfortable with my sexuality. The only time I ever questioned it was [on the] question of whether I liked guys or not.' This issue was resolved for Maria when she fell in love with a male at age 19.

Ravenna expressed a similar combination of self-acceptance and confusion during her childhood and teenage years:

To be honest I've always been relatively happy with it myself. I've known since the age of five, I would say, five or six, that something was different. Again you don't have the vocabulary at that time to describe it or to be able to say what it is, but you know something is different... I think bisexuality can be a lot more confusing particularly in the teenage years. I think being in a church, you're feeling what you 'should be feeling'. You know, you should be feeling these feelings towards boys, so you've kind of got that, oh yes, this is ok. But then you've got, but I shouldn't be feeling like this towards girls... this bit's ok and this bit's not.

Meanwhile, Frannie expressed an ever-growing acceptance of her bisexuality, as well as an acknowledgement of sexual preferences and qualitative differences between both the genders, and within her own gender:

I've never had a relationship with a lady as such, I've always had men. But I've always found comfort in women, and find them very attractive... When I first started looking at women, I wasn't sure if I was really gay, but then I really found myself drawn to men. So I was always quite confused when I first started. But now I've matured and I'm older, now I kind of know I get pleasure at seeing women's bodies. I like seeing women's bodies, I like looking at women's boobs, I like the way when I have kissed women, how they feel when they kiss and hug. You kind of get a warmer feeling than what I would do with a female friend.

Exposure to other bi-identified people was key to Adele:

One of my friends came out as bi ... and it made sense, really. Ok, there is a word for having those strong feelings one way or the other, but that he could go either way in the best possible sense of that. Cos previous to that, it had always been presented as you're gay or you're straight and you have to make a choice. And as soon as I heard the word, I thought, 'oh, right, yes, that's it.'

The importance of exposure to different gender identities in formulating one's own sexual identity was also noted by Ali. This was expressed in a slightly different way, this time highlighting the confusion between bisexuality and pansexuality:

People use the term pansexual to describe the attraction to male or female and non-binary people. I probably haven't met enough non-binary people to decide whether I'm pansexual or bisexual.

## **7.5 Bisexuality and Scripture**

Chapter 4, *Bisexuality and the Church* and Chapter 6, *Bi-Affirming Pastors & Educators in the UK*, touched on the ability to locate bisexuality within Scripture. In this next section, participants in Research Cell 2 reflected on how bi-friendly the Bible and the Divine felt to them as bisexual Christians.

Here respondents were asked questions such as, is the Bible for or against bisexual people? How LGBT or LGBT-friendly is the figure of Jesus? Do you believe God made you bisexual? Whilst acknowledging the inherent anachronism in discussing sexual orientation in Scripture, it was felt that since pro-gay theologians use biblical texts to justify homosexuality, it was not unreasonable to look for bisexual role models within the same texts.

Robyn felt that Jesus was at least supportive of LGBT people in his lifetime, if not identifying as LGBT himself:

I do think that he was either, you know, gay in some way or another. He was human, wasn't he? ... he mixed with outcasts, people like that, and I'm fairly certain a lot of the people he mixed with would have been gay people of the day.

Gillian stated that the diversity inherent in creation therefore extends to human sexuality, both now and in Jesus's day: 'God made us who we are. There is diversity in the whole of nature. It's just society which has yet to catch up.'

This sentiment was echoed by Sandra, who responded 'Yup' to the question, 'Did God create you bisexual?'

Robyn also pointed out the difficulties in taking Scripture out of cultural context in condemning homo- or bisexuality:

You have to put what God is saying in context, in that a lot of the Bible is written by men at a time when they lived in a male dominated society, and things were just done in that particular way. And I think particularly if you study Judaism and men and

women's roles, and how different they were... you have to take that into context when you're reading.

Patriarchal traditions and sexual control within Biblical times was also mentioned by Moira, an Anglican Priest and academic:

I don't really think that the Church should be maintaining what is found in the bible, because what's found in the bible is all based on a culture that is pre-contraceptive and therefore that is the big focus – as well as, of course, the focus on controlling women's bodies. And so I don't really think that the sexual ethics of the bible or older Christian tradition has a great deal to say to people in the 21<sup>st</sup> century... the husband and wife idea in the bible is based around raising families in a pre-contraceptive age. I think Christian ethics need to be updated to our present scientific reality.

This view was echoed by Adele, another Anglican:

The Bible largely reflects the culture of the time anyway. I feel that... we're not asked to replicate what's in the Bible, we're asked to use it to make sense of what's going on now and use it as a jumping off point, if you like.

Chris also pointed out that some traditions considered unambiguously biblical by Christian fundamentalists did not actually exist in biblical times and were not the sole preserve of the Hebraic or Judaic tradition:

Christians need to recognise that when you look at church history, it tells us that some of our church traditions (including marriage) haven't been in existence as long as some of us think, and were never the sole province of the church anyway.

Susannah, now a self-declared atheist, came to an early realisation that the Bible should be seen as a product of its culture, with neither the text itself nor its main players being accorded infallible status. This was partially influenced by a more liberal church upbringing:

I was never brought up with this – you know – the Bible is this protected text of truth. For me, the theology I was brought up in a church environment is: this is the Bible and you use it to help you with your faith and you draw inspiration from passages and that it was written by humans. They were inspired by God, but it was written by humans.

Adele felt that the sheer lack of narrative infill on Jesus enabled bisexual people to locate their identity within him: 'For the historical Jesus, there's not enough evidence... I find it useful that we know practically nothing about his personal life. I find it leaves room for everything I am, I might be, or I was.'

But for Corinne, who now describes herself as lesbian and ex-Christian, the sketchy detail on Jesus enables fundamentalists to mold him to their agenda: 'The one thing they always tell you

is, 'well, Jesus never spoke about homosexuality, therefore it's sinful.' That seems to be the interpretation. And certainly the churches I was in, Jesus was very much for people in the church.'

Gillian felt that the Bible was, at times, at odds with her own personal truths. Yet on the whole, she found plenty in Scripture to confirm both the existence of bisexuality in Biblical times, and God's compassion and redemption of bisexual people:

I find some of the passages in the Bible which inform my beliefs a little hard to reconcile with the truth in my life. But ultimately I know that God is love. And I have to reframe my beliefs somewhat to find self-acceptance. It says over and over again in the Bible that God is love. Love therefore is God. When you feel love, you are feeling the presence of God. I do not believe that God could possibly judge me harshly for loving.

For Gillian, the figure of King David was key to locating her own personal redemption story in Scripture:

... he is portrayed in negative and positive lights, but all the while God loves him. Then there is the story of David and Jonathan. I am convinced that theirs was a sexual relationship, or if it wasn't consummated, that David loved Jonathan in a way that is like a sexual emotion. Then there is the story of David and Bathsheba... ultimately, the story of David and Bathsheba shows me that God loves, forgives, and blesses even situations which start in dubious ways. This because God is love. This makes me remain a Christian, even if not all of the doctrine surrounding sexuality makes sense. I have had to make up my own mind about it and be less fundamentalist or 'evangelical.'

Meanwhile, Ali, an Anglican ordinand, saw intersexuality, as well as sexual and gender fluidity, echoed in the Book of Genesis:

I sometimes reflect on Genesis 1:27, when it says male and female he created them, and I think about how humans at the beginning were male and female, it's not an issue. It's only in the garden that it [got separated]. While in Genesis 1, it's much more fluid. There's a possibility that man might be made for man, and woman might be made for woman. It's not just woman is made for man. Our maleness and femaleness is not what defines us as humans.

Ali also alluded to the potential bisexuality of Jesus, with particular reference to the beloved disciple, John, and Mary Magdalene:

In terms of role models, I suppose Jesus is a pretty good role model, in the sense that he has quite close, I would say... erotic relationships with his female disciples and with his male disciples. There's the disciple whom Jesus loved, but there's also Mary Magdalene. I don't think we can say that there wasn't an erotic element to those relationships.

For Kathryn, the cultural context of the Bible could not be ignored, yet at the same time, she did not feel it was particularly inclusive of bisexual people:

I think for me, the Bible was written at time when there wasn't even a word for bisexuality, when it was a male dominated society. It was a time when they didn't have the understanding scientifically that we have now. I think it was written in the language of the time – the thing about adultery – their women were possessions, they weren't wives as we know them today. I think a lot of it you have to take in the spirit of the time... it doesn't turn me away, but I don't think it's overly welcoming about bisexuality.

## **7.6 Relationship Configurations**

In terms of relationship configurations, the majority of those interviewed were in long-term, monogamous relationships at the time of interview ( $n=16$ ), with one in a polyamorous relationship ( $n=1$ ) and eleven not in a relationship ( $n=11$ ).

Of the 16 in long-term relationships, ten were married or cohabiting with opposite sex partners ( $n=10$ ), and six were in long-term same sex partnerships ( $n=6$ ). The polyamorous respondent had an opposite sex partner and two same-sex partners. Three of those now in long-term relationships had previously been in polyamorous ones. Despite the common stereotyping of bisexuals as sexually promiscuous or adulterous (Houdmann 2014; Church of England 1991), my study found little evidence of this among the bisexual Christians interviewed for this research cell. That is not to say, however, that they held conservative views on non-monogamy; I found the majority of those I spoke to erred towards a liberal and affirming view of polyamory, provided all parties were consensual.

For example, Judy, whilst acknowledging that she would struggle to manage her jealousy in a polyamorous relationship, had no issue with those for whom it felt appropriate:

The things that I can't reconcile with my faith is anything that's abusive, anything that's not consensual, anything that makes anyone else subservient in any way, regardless of what gender that is. So I personally would struggle to be in a polyamorous relationship because I could not in any way manage my jealousy that would not manifest itself in my behaviour.

Maria also felt unsuited to polyamory, but had no objections to the practice: 'Yes [it's ok], as long as it's all consensual and everyone understands. I could never do it myself, because I have low-self-esteem and I'd get very obsessive and jealous.'

For others, it was jealousy on the part of their long-term partner that precluded following a polyamorous pathway. Sandra commented, when questioned on her views on polyamory:

I think for me personally... I could see myself being able to hold that tension. I think in terms of practicalities and challenges and stuff, it's probably more difficult than I'd like to imagine. I think my partner would find it difficult... and yes, I have had a relationship with a woman and he put up with it for a while... that was a really difficult situation... I wouldn't have any kind of moral issues with the idea, it's kind of the emotional relationships that would make it difficult.

Gillian was one such respondent who had found that both partners' dissatisfaction with her v-node relationship had led to a marital breakdown and significant mental health issues:

I lived polyamory for a year and in truth, it did not harm my children or my partner's children at all. They were fine with it and loved the larger social group dynamics... but the truth was, that it didn't work for me and it actually caused harm to my female partner, who in the end was completely torn between her love for me and trying to live in a way she just couldn't reconcile... I could see the pain in my husband's eyes. I had started to self-harm and felt suicidal. I didn't feel like I had any stability as I never knew which bed I would wake up in and I felt like I wasn't being a good partner to anybody. So in the end, I had to make a choice.

Whilst Gillian did not have a problem with polyamory itself, it was not a relationship configuration that worked for her, and not one she felt was tenable in Western society:

Whilst I approve of it for anybody who wants to try – and I don't think it's inherently wrong – this doesn't mean it works in our society... I don't believe western people have the tools or the language or emotions to support this way of living. And extended family and friends just don't know how to handle it, what to say, who to invite, and in the end, people just get very hurt and torn.

Though Gillian did not feel non-monogamy was inherently sinful as a Christian, she did feel her integrity as well as her mental health was compromised by the choices she made:

I truly believed that it was ok and that God was ok with it. I don't know if I have changed my mind on that, but I know that I wanted to live in more purity with somebody who would love me as much as I loved them with no immorality, and I wasn't convinced that being married and having affairs with women was loving with integrity, no matter how I framed it.

Frannie was another respondent who did not object to polyamory where all parties were transparent with one another:

I think if you're honest from the front and say, this is who I am, and your partner loves you enough to accept that and allows you to be the person that you are, then I think, yeah, what's wrong with that? It's all down to the individual people.

Ravenna, whilst acknowledging a lack of exposure to polyamory, stated:

I'm not massively comfortable with it myself. I don't know enough people to have had a conversation with them to understand how it works. So the short answer is, I don't really know. Am I open to it? I'm certainly not bothered if other people are in those relationships and everybody is happy with it. Then great, I have no massive problem with that.

She also questioned the assumption that the Bible was against multiple partners, citing the numerous examples in Scripture of concubines and polygamy:

I would say there is no biblical reason for not being happy with that, as well, no theological reason. The Bible is not a monogamous story. The history of human relationships is not monogamous. So to a point, I don't mind that for people. I've never been in a situation myself where I've had to decide for myself whether I can live with that, so I don't know.

Robyn also felt that the New Testament did not rule out polyamory, citing Christ as potentially enjoying multiple relationships, with or without a fully sexual component:

I think anything, as long as the partnership is loving and considerate of others... I think it's important that you're honest, too... I think God just calls us to love each other and I think you just have to get by in the best way that you can. And Jesus had different relationships with lots of different people on lots of different levels. And I don't think there's anything in the Bible that says that he was particularly monogamous in any way. And I see myself as a follower of Jesus and as long as I don't do anything that goes against his teaching, then I feel quite comfortable about that.

However, Robyn did not feel her evangelical Anglican congregation would share her views.

When asked how her church would react to a threesome in the front pew, she replied: 'I think they'd be absolutely horrified, even those people who perhaps had some sympathy with LGBT issues. I would still think that that would be well beyond their understanding.'

Judy was not convinced of the ethics of polyamory from a biblical perspective, but felt that loving, constructive relationships with multiple partners did not contradict God's loving nature, either. She also drew attention to the issue of shame among many Christians and pointed out the advantages of having grown up in an unchurched family, without sexual repression:

I have friends who are Christians who are in polyamorous relationships. They haven't had the luxury that I've had of not growing up in a Christian household, of not growing up in churches. I came to a very, very sex positive view long before I came to church. So I have watched them struggle with these things and feeling guilt and shame about them in some ways. I can't look at that behaviour and say, that's not Christian behaviour, because the God of my understanding doesn't see things in that way. It's



not black and white, it's not one thing or the other. It's about what feeds you spiritually and what brings you closer to God. So there will be plenty of people who are Christians, for whom polyamorous relationships would be really destructive and really unhelpful and really separating for whatever reason. And for them, that's not a good choice. For lots of other people, monogamous relationships would be really separating and really unhelpful. That's kind of where I'm at. I can't find anything in Scripture that justifies how I feel, apart from everything God says about love.

Moira, having pre-warned me that she was 'quite a radical in terms of sexual ethics' highlighted again the importance of placing Scripture in its cultural context:

I think that the only relationships that should be outside the realm of Christian ethics are those where it's harming another... But beyond that, I don't really think that the Church should be maintaining what is found in the Bible, because what's found in the Bible is all based on a culture that is pre-contraceptive and therefore that is the big focus, as well as, of course, the focus on controlling women's bodies. And so I don't really think that the sexual ethics of the Bible or older Christian tradition has a great deal to say to people in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Laurence responded more simply: 'My main position on the matter is that it's not for me to judge other people's relationships. I'm sometimes a bit uncomfortable with people who seem to be very promiscuous.'

Jane stated even more succinctly: 'I believe in adults behaving in the way that's best for them.'

Others were less approving. Justin commented: 'I think monogamous relationships [are appropriate for Christians]. I don't think polyamorous relationships are a thing we should be entering into.'

Johnny stated: 'I'd consider a relationship with either a man or a woman, but only one partner. More than one partner just doesn't feel right.'

Claudia felt that the Bible placed too high a premium on faithfulness to view polyamory as suitable for a person of the Christian faith:

I explored it as a concept while I was single, and have no problem with ethical non-monogamy for people who choose it – however, I struggle to see how it could be compatible with Christian relationships, because Christian faith seems to so highly value the faithfulness, commitment and mutual self-sacrifice that is diluted in any grouping of more than one pair.

However, Moira disagreed:

... it shouldn't be up to those who aren't straight to fit into a model that isn't them and frustrate people... I wouldn't draw any ethical distinction between those who are

happy with pure monogamy, or those who need something, whether it's a full sexual relationship or not, that they need some way of expressing their attractions going in two ways.

I asked those who were in long-term relationships whether they ever felt suffocated as a bisexual person, and whether they felt they needed, as Moira termed it, 'some way of expressing their attractions going in two ways.' Some who had been married for some time conceded that it could be difficult at times to cope within a monogamous relationship. Robyn, who has been with her husband for 43 years, admitted: 'I've been married for many years, but sometimes that's difficult because it doesn't always completely fulfil you; which is a hard thing to handle.'

Chris, another retired participant, commented:

I find myself in a marriage where my feelings have shifted. This is hard to handle... I still love my wife, but do find I have sexual needs directed elsewhere that are really hard to live with, that earlier in our marriage I could ignore.

Younger participants in committed relationships did not appear to feel this way, suggesting that they maybe have not yet experienced the sexual fluidity of bisexuality over a lifespan. For example, Elena was keen to emphasise her satisfaction with her partner: 'I'm very in love with my husband. I'm very sexually satisfied. I feel fine being monogamous. I'm quite happy with my husband sexually.'

However, Giles was a retired married person who did find sexual satisfaction in marriage, so it does not appear to be necessarily the case that bisexual contentment in marriage is age-related.

Kathryn felt that previous intimacy with more than one gender better equipped an individual to remain with one partner later in life. This would explain some of the difficulties faced by older bisexual people like Robyn and Chris, who grew up in a less tolerant age where settling down with the opposite sex was the only viable option.

I wouldn't say if I was in a relationship with one person and that person identified as female, that I would feel like something was missing unless I was with someone who identified as male as well. I would say I have a need to be intimate with someone, but it doesn't matter what their gender is, I guess. But then I've been with people who identify as male and female. I think if I'd only ever been with someone who identified as male, there'd always be that thing in the back of my head...

## **7.7 Bisexual Christian Mental Health**

The mental health of participants is discussed in this final section of Chapter 7, taking into consideration the dual stressors of bi-erasure and bi-stigmatisation on the mental health of bisexual Christians, as well as the effects of intersectionality. Examples of good mental health are also documented, challenging current research on poor bisexual psychosexual outcomes (e.g. Jorm et al. 2002; Brennan et al. 2010; Colledge et al. 2013). Mindful of recent research, I took particular care with this line of questioning to only attribute poor mental health to bisexuality related issues where it was explicitly stated as such by the respondent, in the interests of keeping an open mind and not skewing the data.

Robyn spoke of self-harming (cutting) as a teenager due to sexuality related anxiety, as did Frannie:

From fifteen up to about twenty, I was actually under the Mental Health Act. I suffered severe depression, was on anti-depressants for a very long time, had lots of counselling. I used to self-harm. I used to scratch into my arms and pick at my arms and cut my arms. I think a lot of it was not understanding myself.

The absence of any support in church circles was mentioned by a number of participants. For example, Tristan spoke of the effect of fundamentalist Christian rhetoric on his self-esteem:

Obviously sin is everywhere and they say every sin is equal. But because of the amount of conversation, rhetoric about LGBT issues, I always feel like my sin is worse. Like me being bi is worse than the guy who smokes or does drugs. I'm hard on myself a lot more. I think for me personally, a large degree of why I hate myself so much, or why I'm so hard on myself, is because of my faith. And so really it does make me question, what's the point in having a faith, if it causes this?

Of those who drew a direct link between suicidality and sexuality, two out of four (Frannie and Tristan) spoke of a faith and sexuality conflict. Frannie acknowledged that her suicide attempts were entirely linked to her sexuality and inability to process her same-sex feelings. The impossibility of discussing her sexuality at church was a major contributory factor in her depression escalating into suicidality:

[My vicar] was a very formal vicar and I don't think you could ever approach him about sexual matters. It was kind of like, if you went up to him and told him [about being bi/gay], you would have been thrown out the church. I never heard him speak about gay or lesbian.

Tristan commented: 'I have attempted suicide twice... part of it is definitely linked to faith and sexuality... it has affected a lot of my self-belief, self-esteem. I make one mistake and it's like, oh no, I've ruined everything.'

Ravenna stated that her suicidal thoughts were 'most definitely linked to her sexuality and how others perceived her, but did not link these thoughts specifically to faith or church-life. Chris drew clear links between suicidality and sexuality, but insisted that he did not feel conflicted over his faith: 'My faith has never been an issue amongst this... I do not have faith conflicts.'

The potential negative affect of fundamentalist Christianity on the mental health of bisexual people was powerfully summed up by Corinne, who stated that her church experiences had left her with a 'deep rage about God and about the Church.'

Whilst not defining herself as depressed, Jane did express the negative effects of bisexual erasure on her sense of equilibrium:

The invisibility and the silence about it... it kind of drives me a bit crazy. It's kind of like, if you're trying to be something that's so silent and not talked about, and you know the B in LGBT is so silent, there's something about asserting it at the same time that can lead me to feeling a bit mad.

Jane also expressed a sense of anxiety around lesbian Christians who, in her view, did not approve of her bisexuality: 'I'm definitely anxious and I would say I've been more anxious since I told all my lesbian friends that I was bi... because I sense disapproval, even if it isn't voiced.'

Cat, an ordinand in the Church of England, expressed frustration at the misunderstandings caused by the House of Bishops publication, *Issues in Human Sexuality* (Church of England 1991), which infers automatic adultery on the part of bisexual people:

When people go forward for ordination training and they have to sign up to 'Issues in Human Sexuality,' which states that 'bisexual activity is inevitably unfaithful,' I find it hard that the official document ordinands are forced to accept has such a fundamental misunderstanding of bisexuality that it implies that to be bisexual I have to sleep with both men and women at the same time... especially when I am intending to put myself forward for ordination!

Moir, already ordained as a priest in the Church of England, felt that life as a bisexual member of the clergy got easier, if you were prepared to compromise your principles at the point of ordination, as generally you were 'left on your own to get on with things' once licensed:

It's at the point of being ordained that you have to affirm things that you may well be deeply uncomfortable with affirming. But once you've got over that, if you can compromise with your principle attack points, then it's actually much easier from then on in, because you're not being constantly asked, 'Do you still affirm the Issues in Human Sexuality?'

Cat felt that this simplistic fundamentalist and monosexist logic was not confined to the church hierarchy. She felt under constant suspicion from clergy and laity alike, regarding both her bisexual identity and her commitment to her female partner:

I also find it hard that people think I can just 'choose' to be with a man, and that I'd therefore be straight, and stop causing trouble! They don't understand that I'm in love with one woman and committed to her for life, and that I can't give that up just because being with a man would be more convenient for their theology. They also don't understand that even when I was with a man, I was still bisexual, and that if I married a man, I would still be bisexual. People seem uncomfortable with the idea of bisexuality existing as an orientation once you're settled with one person, because it forces them to admit that people in long term relationships still have the capacity to be attracted to other people. I still have the capacity to find men attractive, and that in no way detracts from my life-long commitment to my female partner, nor does she feel threatened by it.

Adele, another Anglican, uttered similar frustrations to Cat:

It's constantly feeling one has to justify oneself. That one is constantly having to correct assumptions – either assuming I'm straight because I've got a male partner or assuming that I'm straight cos I'm Christian. An infuriating thing is that people are assuming that because you're Christian, you're going to be a raving homophobe. It's that constant dance of what do these people think about me and am I ok with them thinking that about me? ... it's the dealing with other people's reactions or expectations or assumptions... that's what makes it difficult.

She summarised that it was mentally exhausting being bisexual because you had to explain yourself 'over and over and over again.' Harry communicated a similar sense of 'intersectionality fatigue', commenting: 'It does require a certain amount of emotional energy at times, e.g. having to figure through different complexities in life that others may not need to, though I guess everyone has their stuff to figure through.'

Claudia, also Anglican, and not fully out as bisexual, expressed similar anxieties regarding the perceptions and expectations of others:

I worry people assume that being bi is a phase, that it's ok for me, because if I'm attracted to both, I can 'just choose the right one' and marry a man, but it's not that simple. Although I don't see myself as 50/50 when it comes to male/female attraction, it almost feels like half of you is accepted but the other half, 'the dark side', is not. You can feel like you live in a split world of being someone people can be proud of, but what if they knew your other side? I guess that's true for most LGBT people if they've hidden it from others.

Adele also spoke of the difficulties of coming out as a bisexual compared to gay or lesbian, as there was no clear existing culture to access: 'I don't know about far more difficult, but it is

definitely more difficult, I think. Partly because there's not that narrative, that accepted narrative that you fit into.' Susannah, a former Baptist, concurred with this view: 'I think if you're gay, it's easy to pick up what your culture is, how you're supposed to be, but if you're bi, every person has to work it out for themselves until they find a community.'

Adele also felt that it was hard to come out when you were already in a committed relationship or marriage: 'You feel like you've done things in the wrong order. You know, you're not meant to come out when you're with your life partner.' However, she did not have any sense of spiritual conflict regarding her sexuality: 'I haven't felt for a very long time that there's any conflict about being a bisexual Christian. And the more integrated they are, the happier I am.' She did report some historical suicide ideation regarding her sexuality, but that Seasonal Affective Disorder was the main influence on suicidality in her case.

Sandra also alluded to the assumption of heterosexuality when a woman is married to a man, even within a very LGBT affirming church environment:

On the whole, people just assume that you're straight and that you fit in... if you're a woman shacking up with a man and you're married, I think basically people make the assumption you're straight. I think it would be much easier to be either lesbian or heterosexual. I think bis just do not exist.

Ali spoke of a lack of safe space for bisexual Christians to grow and develop:

I don't feel like there's a safe space for me to explore my sexuality, in the sense that even in the LGBT crowd, there isn't a safe space to explore that. There's not a safe space to talk about it with my straight friends... it doesn't feel like there's an easy place to do that.

Chris spoke of the difficulties of sexual fluidity within a long-term marriage, and indicated that his sexuality (though not his spirituality) had been at the root of his suicidal feelings:

I find myself in a marriage where my feelings have shifted. This is hard to handle, because I love everyone in my family. I still love my wife, but do find I have sexual needs directed elsewhere that are really hard to live with, that earlier in our marriage I could ignore.

Giles, on the other hand, expressed contentment within his second opposite-sex marriage and felt no such sexual longings. However, he did feel that people laid too much store by sexual fulfilment as a source of happiness:

I think often the resolution of one's sexuality etcetera is kind of seen as coming into a Promised Land. But I don't think it necessarily is. Although sexuality is a huge thing in

people's lives, it is not all there is. It's one thing. So to address the whole person, you need something more than just sorting out one's sexuality or being belligerent about your own sexual identity or whatever. I think people and their sexuality is a huge part of what they are, but a person is more than just that, a person is a person as well.

For Tristan, the constant barrage of criticism levelled at LGBT people by fundamentalists, both in person and via the media, was a key stressor, affecting his self-esteem:

You just have to google Christianity/LGBT issue or event or something, and it's this pastor in the US said this, this UK church did this... it's very negative. It's just that sort of, that stack of evidence, I guess, saying that you're wrong, that's wrong, how dare you! And although they're not saying it to me directly, indirectly they are, because they're talking about me.

However, on the positive side, many respondents expressed feelings of contentment as a bisexual. Self-acceptance appeared to be a huge factor in good mental health. Kathryn commented:

I guess I feel more comfortable now that I'm out, to see what I find attractive in people, and it's not so much about their gender, it's about the person they are. And when I was straight, that was a really hard thing to explain... it's become easier since I've embraced being bisexual.

Ravenna expressed similar sentiments:

I think it does give you a wider appreciation of people. I think you see people more for who they are, because you're not going, there's a fit bloke, I must look at him as a fit bloke. You actually can understand him as a person.

Robyn remarked: 'It's quite good fancying both men and women. That's quite a nice thing.'

Laurence, whilst he struggled to find positive aspects to being bisexual, did speak of the clarity that came with self-acceptance: 'The only thing I would say is, if you like, good about being bisexual is that it feels honest... I feel like I'm being honest about who I am.'

For Frannie, transparency and self-understanding was an antidote to suicidal feelings:

I now understand who I am and I'm happy. And it's actually worked wonders, because I'm not thinking, 'Oh, I want to kill myself.' I'm not hiding from the world anymore. I'm actually, 'if you don't like me, then don't talk to me.'

Robyn felt that happiness was possible for the bisexual Christian, though conceded she hadn't entirely achieved it herself:

I think I've reached that place to a degree. I think from the people I've met, that there's a lot of quite mixed-up people with perhaps mental health issues. They find life quite

difficult. But I think there is a way; you just have to find it. You have to be happy with yourself and if you're happy with yourself, then you can live there.

For others, their faith had helped them accept themselves. Stephen, who had two major spells in psychiatric care, remarked: 'I think my second big recovery came when I returned to faith. The church helped me... I learnt how to be me, not depressed.'

Of the 28 bisexual Christians interviewed in this research cell, 25 reported poor mental health, ranging from periodic bouts of low mood (dysthymia), to sustained periods of depression and/or anxiety (both medically and self-diagnosed), to suicide ideation and attempted suicide.

While such statistics (89% depressive disorders) clearly support existing findings on the mental health of bisexual people, the findings from this research cell also challenge claims that bi-specific cultural phenomena such as identity erasure, stigmatisation and intersectionality are the root cause of depressive behaviour amongst bisexuals. Whilst issues surrounding peer acceptance and identity formation were clearly expressed by a number of participants, they by no means dominated. Indeed, non-sexuality related grounds for poor mental health, such as stress at work and family breakdown actually exceeded 'typical' bisexual factors, such as identity erasure and stigmatisation.

Indeed, it could be reasonably argued that individuals with pre-existing mental health issues, clinical or otherwise, often seek religion as a 'cure' or source of support, in which case, sexuality may not be the factor behind adverse mental health at all. A study into this was deemed beyond the scope of this research project.

As Barker notes (Barker 2015: 372), 'human experience is complexly biopsychosocial' with an ongoing interplay between genetics, social experience and psychology, with biological and socio-cultural factors determining our psychological responses to the world as we experience it. This makes it very difficult to extract any one element as being determinant in mental health outcomes. This 'biopsychosocial' aspect is reflected in an observation from Chris:

We need to provide education for bisexuals about what to expect of life. There are no role models. Some of us don't understand how to handle it. I find my sexuality shifts sometimes, in response to age, feelings, friendships, trauma, etc. Because of societal pressures, I feel guilty about this. I have a kind of internalised biphobia, because of what I have absorbed from society as I grew up.



## **7.8 Conclusion**

This first chapter covering the experiences of bisexual Christians in the UK focused on their general experiences of life as a bisexual person of faith. I looked at how participants understood both their faith and sexuality, and at the point of intersection between the two. Concepts of the divine were also examined, to pinpoint potential sources of congruence and conflict between orthodoxy and orthopraxis in terms of bisexual identity and expression. This was of further use in discussing relationship configurations and biblical ethics surrounding non-monogamy.

The mental health of participants was also considered, where the silence on bisexuality in churches and in general came to the forefront, along with both the fatigue and confusion of trying to live out an intersectional identity that is all but invisible in church and public life.

Chapter 8 will look more specifically at individual lived experience, both in the church and within the LGBT faith community.



## CHAPTER 8

### Bisexual Christians and Church Life in the UK

This chapter focuses on the experiences of bisexual Christians at their places of worship, including both churches and other worship venues. The various attitudes per denomination towards bisexuality and bisexual congregants are covered, as well as attitudes within the LGBT faith community in general towards non-monosexual individuals. The willingness of churches and worship communities to address bisexuality within written resources and sermons is also discussed as a gage of inclusive practice towards bisexual people of faith. I was interested in seeing whether each denomination complied with their own doctrinal statements as outlined in Chapter 4: *Bisexuality and the Church*, or whether certain churches or traditions have been able to navigate a way around non-affirming church policies.

#### 8.1 Bi-visibility within the LGBT faith community

This first section looks at the wider faith community beyond church services (which are dealt with later in the chapter). This community might include affirming denominational or ecumenical organisations in the UK for LGBT Christians or other potentially affirming worship venues. Do bisexual people feel accepted by bespoke LGBT Christian groups and their members, and do these groups actually provide the support often lacking within heteronormative environments?

Several participants alluded to the lack of provision for bisexual people in both the nomenclature and the activities of LGBT Christian organisations. It was noted by several participants that groups such as the Lesbian & Gay Christian Movement (LGCM), Lesbians Exploring Faith Together (LEFT) and the Quaker Lesbian & Gay Fellowship (QLGF), whilst containing the word bisexual in their straplines, did not make it abundantly clear that bisexual Christians were welcome.

Ravenna commented:

I do see a lot of bi erasure. You know you have the group, the Lesbian & Gay Christian Movement. You have a lot of ones that are called Lesbian and Gay. And that's it. I thought that about their conference [LGCM]. Their conference looks really interesting,

but I thought, I can't go to that, because I'm not lesbian or gay. I'm absolutely aware that the majority of bi erasure that happens, both in church and society, is unintentional. But it happens and we notice it and it makes you feel not valued, and like you don't have a say.

Cat also commented on the absence of bi-specific support groups, saying that she had 'never come across anything explicitly for bisexual people.' Jane was not so sure that such slights were wholly unintentional, remarking on the tendency of lesbian Christians, in her view, to only accept bisexual women if they were discreet about their bisexuality, or in same-sex relationships:

... one of my really, really good friends personally invited me and was always reassuring me that it's fine that I'm bi, because I'm with [name of same-sex partner]. So it's kind of like you're sort of lesbian then! ... I know if I went along, I would probably be welcome, but they'd probably want me to be a bit quiet about being bi. Don't be too ranty, don't be a ranty bi, just be gay, you know.

Laurence also felt lesbian and gay Christians were just as guilty as their heterosexual peers of binary thought processes, viewing bisexual people through a monosexist lens:

I guess particularly in church circles, you have some people who think that anything other than heterosexuality is bad. But there's also some people, particularly I think some gay Christians, who might say things that suggest that bisexuals are letting the side down, if you like. There's some people who say, 'God made me gay and I'm definitely gay and bisexual people are sort of, if you like... make me feel like being gay is just a phase.'

Frannie concurred, commenting:

... it seems it's more accepted if you're gay or straight, cos you're still in a category. If you're bisexual and one minute you have a boyfriend and the next minute you have a girlfriend, they kind of think, well you must be gay or you must be straight, you can't be both... but actually you can be, because I'm here and I'm living proof that you can be!

Tristan echoed similar frustrations:

One thing I've found annoying is, if you say you are bi, they assume gay, because there's that element to it. And also you can be mostly gay but a bit straight in that sort of bi sort of spectrum. But they don't care, they'll see that as mostly gay, it that makes sense. So that's irritating. I'm not gay, I'm bisexual. Even my Christian affirming friends often like assume I'm gay, even though I keep telling them I'm bisexual.

However, another problem was the sheer absence of bisexual Christians, whether that was due to a genuine scarcity of people who identify as such, a fear of coming out the closet as bi either in hetero- or homonormative circles, or the erasure of their bi identity by others. Jane could only number six bisexual Christians among her acquaintances, and even some of these were only ‘broadly Christian,’ while Cat conceded that she knew other bisexual Christians, ‘though not as many as I know lesbian and gay Christians.’ Claudia replied, ‘most other LGBT people I know are trans or gay. It sometimes feels like you’re in a middle ground – like sometimes you wish you were just fully gay...’

Ravenna also commented on the absence of bisexuality at major Christian festivals and conferences such as New Wine, Keswick, Spring Harvest (all evangelical) and Greenbelt (liberal):

I’ve never seen it come up on the programme at Keswick. It’s not come up at New Wine, not in the years I’ve been going... For the most part, it is the forbidden subject. It doesn’t crop up on a thing... there’ll be things for single people, there will be touches and nods and things in terms of human sexuality... but I’ve not seen anything in recent years at New Wine... and let’s face it, I’m looking for them on the seminars.

This was of particular interest, as fifteen to twenty years earlier when I had attended New Wine, ex-gay ministries had been very visible, as touched on in the Introduction to this project.

Ravenna did note that she had heard the ex-gay outfit *Living Out* speak on homosexuality at Spring Harvest in 2015 but that was very much the exception to the rule. In general, the subject of same-sex attraction was ignored rather than proactively opposed or affirmed. This also, surprisingly, was the case at LGBT affirming Christian arts festival, Greenbelt, in Ravenna’s experience:

Some people talked about me doing a session on it [biphobia] at Greenbelt, but that’s never kind of materialised. You don’t get asked, not at all. But I am bolshy enough to push myself forward on that. I might do that next year. I do sometimes go to things just to be pissy. Sometimes I will just play the devil’s advocate if I’m in that mood!

Chris summed up the general invisibility and lack of understanding of bisexuality, both inside and outside of LGBT faith communities: ‘It is not discussed, or generally well understood in Christian circles, even in LGBT Christian circles. It is rare for it to be known about or declared.’

A more humorous observation came from Demi, who noted the dilemma bisexual Christians faced, when accessing affirming dating sites:

I don't know if it's explicit biphobia, but the first question you get asked on a dating website is, do you want to date men or women? I don't want to pay double fees! From the beginning, you almost have to choose.

## **8.2 Bi-visibility in churches per denomination**

This section considers whether churches acknowledge the existence of bisexuality in official teaching and documentation, from the perspective of bisexual congregants. (Specifically incidences of biphobia and bi erasure are dealt with in the next section).

While Chapter 4, *Bisexuality and the Church* and Chapter 6, *Bi-Affirming Pastors & Educators in the UK*, looked at the visibility afforded bisexual people within the major denominations in official church teachings, this section documents the actual lived experience of Christians worshipping within these churches. Is bisexuality truly given credence within the literature and services of the church, or is bisexuality entirely erased out of existence in terms of official recognition of its validity as sexual identity?

As was the case in Chapter 6 with pastors and supporters of bisexual Christians, all participants were asked whether they had a) ever seen any literature, books or study guides relating to bisexuality within their church setting, and b) heard bisexuality mentioned in a sermon, Alpha course or workshop/small-group format.

Cat (Anglican) commented that bisexuality only received a passing mention as part of the LGBT acronym. When asked if she had ever heard bisexuality mentioned in church, she replied: 'No, not that I can remember, except for when they spell out the meaning of LGBT and it gets a mention, but never an explanation.' Claudia, also Anglican, commented: 'I've only heard homosexuality preached on as 'gay', suggesting people who are 100% attracted to the same sex, and that being a sin and wrong.' Harry had heard bisexuality mentioned in a workshop within the Church of England, but never in a sermon. The majority of respondents, however, had never heard bisexuality specifically referred to in either verbal or written communications.

Laurence (Anglican) commented: 'I'm pretty sure no-one has ever mentioned bisexuality at church at all,' while Robyn (also Anglican) stated that she had never heard anyone speak specifically about bisexuality in a church setting, nor seen any bi-specific literature and agreed that it was 'absolutely' as if bisexuality did not exist. She spoke of a general reluctance and malaise among clergy in the Church of England to engage with LGBT issues:

They're quite positive in terms of how they view LGBT issues and perhaps would be quite supportive of the LGBT agenda. But when it comes to doing that in their own setting, they're uncomfortable because it might affect their position among some of the congregation.

This dissonance between the Anglican 'party line' on human sexuality and the view of individual clergy was mentioned by a number of participants, including Naomi, who now attends an independent LGBT affirming church in the North West. For Naomi, it was fear of recriminations that led affirming clergy to adhere to non-affirming church policies:

I think there are a lot of people in the church who are actually like that [affirming]... but I think there are very few people within the Anglican leadership. Once you get to that level and you're not toeing the party line, you soon are junked and punished for it.

However, some Anglican Churches were forward-thinking from clergy down to laity. Sandra commented on her home church in South Yorkshire:

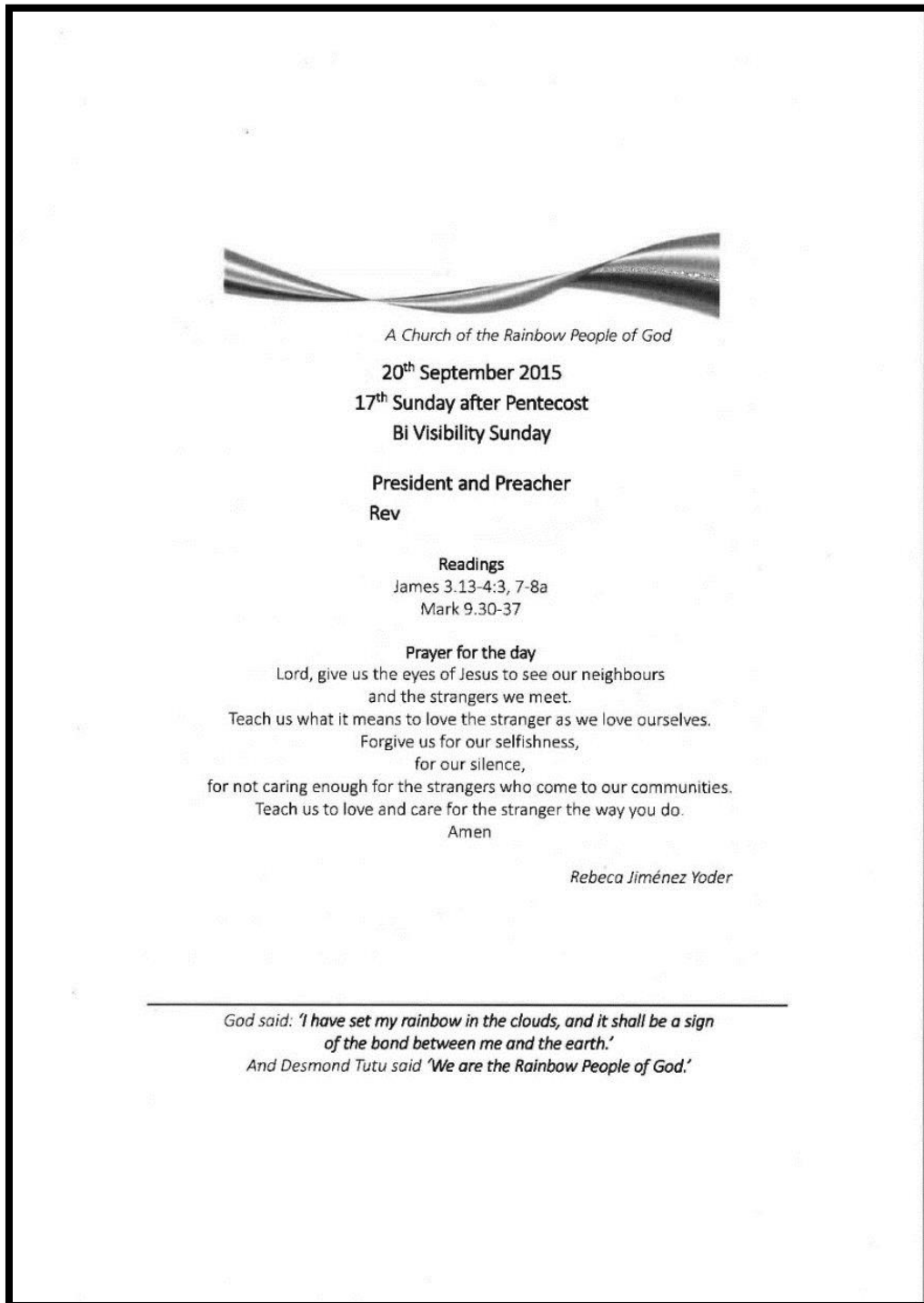
I'm involved in a very liberal, inclusive, welcoming, outwards-looking Anglican Church... we are members of Inclusive Church on the website. We've got the posters. They're up in church. [The vicar] is making a big point about all that sort of stuff. We've had three sermons in the last four months about LGBT issues in the main service and they're all on the website. We have a really good library... and a whole section on LGBT issues... I'm now the webmaster... I try not to be intrusive, but I'm certainly raising the profile and I'm fully supported by our vicar.

Whilst the sermons relate to LGBT in general and not specifically bisexuality, it is encouraging that Sandra, an openly bisexual congregant, is allowed to have input into the church website, suggesting that the priest in charge has no issue with either Sandra's sexuality or potential bi-affirming content being aired on a public forum such as this.

Meanwhile at Kathryn's church in West Yorkshire, well-known for its LGBT affirming stance, the priest in charge actually promoted International Bi-Visibility Day in September 2015 - insofar as he could without breaching canon law (see poster):

Last Bivisibility Day, [at] the church that I go to... I'd asked the vicar and he was going to put it out to everyone to dress in purple for Bivisibility Day. He wasn't allowed to wear purple, but people in the congregation turned up to the service in purple and afterwards he had a purple dog collar on, but after the service. And it was talked about that it was bivisibility day, but also the main part of the service was visibility. It wasn't necessarily directly related to bisexuality, but it had very strong tones... that was almost like the starting point for it. So it was visibility of all sorts, sort of seeing the beauty within and things like that... for me it was at least heavily linked back to bisexuality and that was the general theme.

Figure 8.1: Bisexuality Day Poster



The service sheet advertising Bivisibility Day at Kathryn's church. The name of the church and the celebrant have been blanked out.



Moira (Anglican) stated that even the most affirming of Anglican churches struggled to comprehend, let alone portray, bisexuality as a valid sexual identity. This, in Moira's considered view as a bisexual, transgender Anglican priest, was due to a common misconception among heterosexual people, that your sexual identity is intrinsically linked to the biological gender of the person you are currently dating:

... most places are struggling just to mention even gays and lesbians, and often don't on to mention bisexuals. I think the problem is, most people come from more traditional backgrounds. They don't tend to see these things in terms of sexual identities, they tend to see these things in terms of who's your current partner. So, for example, they may be perfectly happy with a bisexual if that bisexual happens to currently be with someone of the opposite sex... But are they equally as happy if a woman who used to have a girlfriend sitting with her in church now has a boyfriend sitting with her in church? Or whether they can handle this, or whether it means she's changed. The nature of bisexuality is not really on many people's radar, because a lot of people who are heterosexual don't really think in terms of sexual identity. They're more thinking in terms of who it is you go with. So I've never really heard much spoken at all about bisexuality.

For Moira, who up until recently attended a well-known LGBT affirming Anglican church in the heart of London, bisexual people were still very much invisible in church settings:

There were three bisexual women in a row speaking and I said to one of them afterwards, 'Do you realise how odd that is in a church context that three out bisexuals in a row are speaking?' Cos even in a very inclusive church, that is unusual.

Chris stated that while his LGBT affirming independent church in the North West did boast a number of bisexual people among its congregants, the majority were women, owing to the comparative lack of out bisexual men. He felt he was 'a minority within a minority.'

The inability of heterosexual people to understand the bisexual identity has a knock-on effect on the willingness of bisexual people to identify as such, in Moira's view: 'The last relationship I was in, it was just easier to talk to people about being lesbian, rather than saying that I'm a bisexual and I'm currently with a woman.'

Others stood up to the confusion and conflation of bisexuality with homosexuality. Judy commented:

When I've been in relationships, it'll come up in conversation, 'Oh, are you in a lesbian relationship again?' I'm like, 'Not in a lesbian relationship, never in a lesbian

relationship. Sometimes in a relationship with a lesbian, but never in a lesbian relationship. My sexuality does not disappear just because of the other person's.

Justin, a female to male transgender Christian, felt that the Church of England was more accepting of trans people than bisexual people, as it could conceptualise a change in gender far more easily than fluidity of sexual partners: 'I think they might understand it more. I think the idea of someone changing gender is easier to get hold of than someone who dates more than one gender.'

Johnny, who comes from an Assemblies of God and Anglican background, felt that neither church knew how to handle bisexuality: 'They just don't know what to do with it. I think they avoid it. I don't think they deal with it at all.'

This sentiment was echoed by Tristan, an ex-evangelical:

At any church, I don't think people really understand bisexuality that much. In the church, people had sort of began to discuss, you know, gay Christians, lesbian Christians, that sort of thing, but bisexuality is still an odd thing for them... Churches at least acknowledge the L and the G quite a bit, and I guess they also acknowledge the T as well, but I think bisexuality is sort of a bit of a mystery to them. Not even just theologically.

Moirra also pointed to the couples' culture, particularly in evangelical churches, which can lead to a reluctance on the part of bisexual partners to acknowledge potential other sources of attraction:

My experience with LGBT type things is that if you talk to the queer women, you'd probably discover that quite a few of them are bisexual. But ... particularly in the evangelical environment, people tend to couple off... and they might not even openly talk about being bi, because they think this is the person I'm with, this is my life partner. If I say I'm bi, does it sound as if I'm wanting to... that I'm not loyal to them?

However, bi-invisibility and bi-erasure was not limited to less traditionally affirming denominations. Moirra noted that the situation was no different at a Metropolitan Community Church she had attended for a period:

I spent a year going to the Manchester Metropolitan Community Church when I lived up there, and I don't particularly recall a mention of bisexuals while I was there. There was a strong contingent at that church of gay and lesbian people... I don't think I actually met anyone who identified as bisexual at that church.

However, Gillian, a member of another Metropolitan Community Church in London, commented: 'There was no particular reaction as my church is fully inclusive of all sexualities.'

Amelia stated that in both the Baptist church and charismatic evangelical church she had attended in the past, any form of same-sex expression was frowned upon:

I definitely remember there was a belief that you could be gay and Christian so long as you didn't have any kind of relationship. That's an attitude, having had loads of conversations with people at the Baptist church – that was the sort of attitude they had as well.

Amelia also mentioned that the charismatic church she had attended banned friendships with anyone you were attracted to, placing bisexuals in a particularly difficult position. This, for Amelia, carried 'biphobic undertones.' Ali expressed a similar frustration with legalism within the charismatic evangelical church:

[Sexuality] is just so nuanced. That's the thing that annoys me most about evangelical sexual ethics is that it's not nuanced enough. Sometimes a handshake can be deeply sexual... I suppose it's down to whether you intend it to be sexual, I suppose, than a specific 'don't put that there, do put that there.'

Ali had heard bisexuality discussed in a student small-group context, where the view was expressed that bisexual people were 'really lucky' because at least they could choose to be straight, where homosexual people could not.

For Susannah, part of the problem with bisexuality was the lack of tell-tale visible signs that a person is bisexual:

Bisexuality is always a bit different because you can't see it, because it's about what's in someone's head and in someone's heart, and so they look at you and think you're straight or you're gay, because that's the bit you can see.

Ravenna made a distinction between discussions within church settings and outside events, when it came to the acknowledgement of bisexuality:

I've never heard it spoken about in a sermon, and certainly not in Alpha courses, nor even in Alpha courses that I've led, cos it's not the thing you talk about. Seminars and workshops are slightly different, in that you do get to personalise things along the way. At events I've been to with church groups, it's been spoken about, but not in church.

However, even outside events do not always consider the bisexual position. Ravenna made specific reference to Open Church, an annual event held in London which brings together affirming and dissenting voices on LGBT issues, with a view to moving the discussion forward:

It's one of the biggest issues that I have with the church. I was just talking about this at an Open Church thing in London... there are a lot of L and G voices in it, there are a few T voices in it, but there's a distinct lack of people speaking out or speaking up for

bisexuals. It just seems wrong, cos I feel like... particularly in an evangelical church, people are not given the freedom to be who they are. They're either pigeonholed into being gay or straight and actually the vast majority... particularly of young people these days, of course, are identifying as 'not straight', whatever that might be.

I had attended the same Open Church event the year before, where I had been the only bisexual voice on the panel. They did not invite a bisexual person to join the panel in 2016, when Ravenna attended.

For Laurence (Anglican), the church simply did not discuss relationships that did not fall neatly into the heterosexual nuclear norm:

I've never heard a sermon... that's really touched on even just a non-traditional family arrangement from the point of view of just a single parent, let alone people living with more than one partner, or people who are not heterosexual, or anything like that.

Laurence was not sure whether this silence was simply due to heterosexual bias, or an assumption that relationship configurations were not of interest, or for fear of upsetting certain members of the congregation:

The church I currently go to... we don't talk about family or relationships or anything like that explicitly. I think there's this sort of cosy assumption that everyone's broadly going to marry a member of the opposite sex, have a few kids, that sort of thing... I've not heard very many sermons on relationships at all, which seems odd. And I don't know if that's just because people are afraid of saying anything.

Along similar lines, Corinne expressed her frustration with the asexuality of church services she had attended in her time in both the Methodist and Anglican churches:

Sexuality is conspicuous in its absence from church, and that sends a message in itself... one of my frustrations about that kind of church was that sexuality, sex itself, even straight sex, was not talked about, or maybe once a year. There was one talk a year and even then LGBT was not mentioned.

For Chris, it was a lack of biblical guidance on bisexuality that was partially to blame for the inability of even LGBT affirming churches to confront the challenges of bisexuality head-on:

Even though I attend a radical LGBT affirming church, it doesn't tackle the issue of bisexuality in any depth, or how this relates to faith. We just need some help to work out how to do this. The will is very definitely there. I just think we don't know how to tackle it. The Bible says very little about it.

Sometimes the 'affirming-ness' of a church can result in invisibility or erasure of bisexuality almost by default. As Stephen (Anglican) notes: 'I think it's more that all the churches I've been

a regular member of, it's just assumed that obviously in our church it's completely accepting, so there's not a need to preach about it.'

### **8.3 Church Experiences**

This section considers reactions to bisexuality and bisexual Christians within church settings, subdivided into negative and positive experiences.

#### **8.3.1 Negative Church Experiences**

Negative experiences took a number of formats. Some reported homophobic messages being preached from the pulpit, while others narrated individual instances of homo- and biphobia, which varied in intensity.

Claudia (Anglican) described how rampant homophobia in her church growing up forced her to suppress her sexuality:

I grew up in a church that was very anti-gay; homophobia was the only kind of insult/bullying that was accepted and even modelled by some in the church. I really didn't understand my sexuality as I grew up in church. I think I suppressed it because of seeing the reactions and negative beliefs of people in the church. It wasn't until I'd left that church for a few years that I started to piece it all together.

Claudia is still not fully out, and stated that she exercised caution in revealing her sexuality: 'I chose carefully who I told, knowing that they would be reasonably positive or overwhelmingly love me, even if they disagreed with me.' Harry (Anglican) stated along similar lines: 'I am usually fairly selective in who I talk to.'

Robyn, another Anglican, likewise exercised caution, reflected in the rather tentative and contradictory nature of the response to the question:

I think probably one or two people know [but] certainly not in a church context... it's quite difficult to have that conversation. I think opinions about sexuality are just not things people would talk about. And if they did, I'm not sure they would be particularly supportive. I think they would be quite shocked, perhaps if I were to come out. But I think generally they would probably be quite supportive. But I think perhaps among the leadership that might not quite be the same. I think they have much more rightwing views... theologically I think their views are perhaps different to mine.

This response again reflected the dissonance many Anglicans sense between clergy and laity in the Church of England. Laurence, another Anglican and married to an opposite sex partner, expressed similar fears surrounding coming out as bisexual:

... it feels like it's a part of me that I don't feel I can really share with people at church. I think I would almost feel I would want to see someone not connected... I would sort of worry about how that would go, how people would treat me afterwards.

Amelia spoke of losing her faith following a painful period within a charismatic evangelical church in Manchester:

I was being told very clearly and strongly that God thinks this [homosexuality] is a sin. I felt it was a choice between... believing in the kind of God I wanted to believe in, who was loving and just, or agreeing with Church that being gay is sinful. And I left, because I couldn't do those two things. At the time I left, my belief in God was still quite strong... without a church community, I gradually lost my faith in God and that was very distressing and very upsetting at the time. It was a really, really big part of my life and I felt driven out... A lot of people suggested that I'd drifted away – I felt driven out.

Ali also reported homophobia from the pulpit in a charismatic evangelical church in Oxford, where it was 'preached from the front that it [homosexuality] was definitely sinful.'

Johnny stated: '...my young adult leader in my old church told me that I can't serve in any capacity if I have a same-sex relationship. That was a Church of England-slash-Baptist.' The situation for him was no better in the Assemblies of God Church he attended:

I wasn't out... but I know that the person I spoke about it, he was very 'you can't even be bisexual, let alone act on it. You're not saved if you're gay. You're living in sin, you're basically not going to go to heaven.' Bit harsh. That was a view held by a lot of people in that church as well. That hurt me a lot, because he was my former mentor. And one of my best friends at Uni recently – a couple of days ago – told me exactly the same.

Maria (ex=Mormon) suggested that homophobia was perhaps the agenda behind the overt emphasis on family values in the Church of Latter Day Saints: 'It's a very sort of warm and loving atmosphere, but when you take back that layer, it can get quite nasty. It's all very family-based.'

Corinne (ex-Methodist and Anglican) also highlighted how the church's focus on marriage and the nuclear family often translated into a fear of alternative relationship configurations, as well as social exclusion for singles:

There was the time that I arrived slightly late to church. I walked in and the church was full and the only place was in a pew. I had to walk up in front of the vicar into the pew, wright? Late, embarrassed anyway. Sat next to a lady. Then her husband came out of the loo, walked round, asked me to get up and move in front of everybody. Then I had to get up, move. Honest to God... outrageous, isn't it? It was just appalling. And I thought, the lack of sensitivity to people who are not like you.

A homogeneity of views as well as an absence of discussion on sexuality issues, led Corinne to eventually leave the faith:

In conversation with people, on different aspects of life, I would offer a point of view. That was foolish. My opinion was usually different and we're not even talking sexuality here – that was never mentioned. And there was usually this look on their face, 'oh, you're not quite like us, are you?' Do you know what I mean? The pressure to fit the mold...

Robyn (Anglican) reported a direct incidence of biphobia in her evangelical church. Whilst she would not go into details for confidentiality reasons, she indicated it involved a prominent bisexual member of the congregation:

It was a really, really difficult place to be and quite difficult to support the individual and to support the church and the people as well. I just thought it was really sad and I wanted to be there for the individual, but that was a hard thing to do because of my position in the church as well.

Whilst direct biphobia was not an issue for many, a number of participants reported passive aggressive behaviour from church leaders and congregants on disclosing their bisexuality.

Tristan spoke of being 'softly' forced out of his evangelical church in Hampshire:

I got kicked out because of my sexuality basically... once I felt comfortable in the congregation at about a year in, then I told a few members that I liked enough, trusted enough, I guess you could say, and told them that I was bisexual. Nothing else... but I think that was enough. They didn't kick me out, they didn't like literally throw me out. It was more like the atmosphere changed around me. It was more like a soft leave, if that makes sense... people started to like avoiding me slightly, I guess. It was more like that really. It was more avoidance or awkwardness around me, which made me want to leave, sort of style. They didn't throw me out but they made it so I wanted to leave.

Ravenna was less subtly replaced in her Anglican church worship group once it became known that she had attended Pride as a bisexual believer:

I'm now not in the music group at church. I used to be on the worship team. I'm not now. I was told not to be one there... after I had posted something about Pride in London. A message came saying we need to clear up space on the worship team for the worship interns that are coming in, to grow and develop their experience at leading worship at the time. And then the week after, the advert appeared in the newsletter again, saying we need singers to come and help us. I was never told that was the reason, but that was the reason!

For others, there was a simply a total lack of understanding of bisexuality. Jane narrated a humorous incident from a church social event:

I told a vicar, an Anglican vicar, very recently that I was bi. I did that kind of 'bi actually' thing to him, cos he was sort of coming out to me as getting a divorce, because evangelical people... we don't get divorced kind of thing. He said, 'actually we're getting divorced, so now I know what it's like to come out as gay.' And I said, 'I'm bi actually.' And he did nearly choke on his beer! And he was desperate to ask me what this meant, but was too polite to... how very Anglican.

However, despite describing the Church of England as 'institutionally biphobic', she conceded that the only biphobia she had personally experienced had been from lesbian Christians at social events, rather than within church settings, though admittedly biphobia cannot take place where bisexuality is erased in the first place:

If you count a church setting as being more broadly with people that I know who might be lesbian or gay, and I've come out as bi, I have experienced biphobia, yeah... One of the main expressions of biphobia I've had a lot from lesbian Christians is when I came out as bi, they then telling me really, really quickly and quite firmly that they're not. And I've always wanted to go, but I'm not talking about you! It's not biphobia really... well, I experience it as biphobia... why do you need to tell me that you're not?

Jane added, 'You tend to swallow it rather than being rude, well if you're Anglican and British,' because being aggressive and defensive only compounded the stereotype that bisexual people are unstable: 'And if you're ranty, then... it's like, see bisexual women, eh? They're mentally ill... so it's like you can't be angry, then you're proving that you're mad.'

Others, however, were willing to speak out against biphobia, however they were perceived.

Ravenna commented:

...if that means I have to develop a bit of a thick skin, then you know, I do. If it means that I also need to be the person who sticks their head above the parapet... I'm prepared to be that person, you know. If people don't like it, their problem, not mine.

Frannie, an Anglican from Hampshire, was even bolder in standing up to homo- and biphobia:

... there was a church discussion... about gay and things like that. And someone said, 'do you think we ought to open our eyes up a bit more?' And I said, 'I think there's nothing wrong with a set of boobs and a nice bum, I'm all for it!' And it was funny, I had some of the older generation look at me, like, 'that's an inappropriate comment.' And other people went, 'good for you! Good for you!'

Frannie spoke of a tension at her middle-of-the-road Anglican Church between the LGBT affirming vicar and an elderly congregation:

If I turned up with a lady [to church], I know that I would be judged, and I know that I wouldn't be spoken to by some of the older generation, because it's wrong and that's it. When he [the vicar] did the sermon on the gay and straight, there was four people



actually who got up, put their hymn books and bits down and actually walked out the church. There was one that I wouldn't say was too elderly. She got up and walked out and said she wasn't comfortable with the sermon. The others just got up and walked out and refused to come back in until it had finished. They complained among themselves and said it wasn't appropriate and spoke to the committee and church and said it wasn't an appropriate conversation.

Ali (Anglican) found that while church friends could cope with homosexuality, seeing it almost fashionable, they had no idea how to handle bisexuality, grossly simplifying and misunderstanding the associated issues with being attracted to more than one gender. Their behaviour was inconsistent. As Ali is married to an opposite sex partner and has children, such behaviour led to his bisexuality being erased:

I think it's mainly been about denying my sexual identity... if I talk in a church context about being bi, about being attracted to men, it's been, 'well, that's not a problem because you're going out with women.' And so it's not an issue. 'You know, you just need to make sure you resist these simple urges and you'll be fine.' ... it was sort of denied being part of my identity. Weirdly, people would be really happy to slot me into the kind of gay best friend kind of thing. Like a nice purse or something to carry around. It was rather odd, that on the one hand they were totally denying that that was part of who I was, yet on the other hand, essentially treating me though I was.

This confusion over, and erasure of, bisexuality was also alluded to by Ravenna, another Anglican:

I think the Church doesn't have a clue. In fact, in my own church, I've been able to educate a few people, because I think it's so not talked about, people just don't have a clue what it is. One person, a friend of mine, started talking to me when Caitlin Jenner came out as transgender... and started telling me how awful it must be to be trapped in the wrong body, whatever. And I said, 'are you confusing bisexuality with transgender?' Cos I sort of got the impression they were. And they were, and they were like, what's the difference?

Harry was another respondent who felt ignorance rather than hostility characterised the responses of heterosexual Christians to bisexuality:

I would describe the person as having a poor understood traditional perspective – however they were convinced they understood it very well, which made it hard to have a constructive or educative conversation about it. I was surprised at the time, as they were someone who I expected to have a better understanding.

The person couldn't understand why I might want to be in a relationship with a girl, and thought that I must actually just be secretly gay, but in some sort of denial. They also seemed to think that being bi meant that I just hadn't sorted myself out yet.

Robyn (Anglican) reported a general disillusionment with the Church of England and the direction it was heading in terms of LGBT issues:

I was quite central to my church until two or three years ago. But I guess with time I've just found myself further and further from the centre of it - I think just down to the way the church is moving, I guess.

Whilst nobody had been directly subjected to gay aversion therapy, Corinne mentioned prayer healing for homosexuality at a large Anglican church in London she had attended as a student:

There was a guy who was on the leadership team, not one of the main leaders, but on the leadership team, whom I was told in hushed tones after a service – he was pointed out as he walked around the church – in hushed tones, it was said, 'He's gay, but he's praying it through. He's seeking the Lord's healing and he's not acting on it, and that's the important thing. So we're all supporting him, all praying for him, and he's seeking healing and he's going to be healed.

Other churches, meanwhile, believed themselves to be affirming, but in reality, were not.

Ravenna noted, with reference to her evangelical Anglican Church in Gloucestershire: 'They think they're open and welcoming, but they're not.' She agreed that they were fundamentalist 'although they wouldn't like to be described as such.'

Corinne, who now labels herself 'non-Christian' perhaps presented the greatest sense of disillusionment with the Church, of all those interviewed, concluding her interview with me in the following terms:

I will never go back... church doesn't reflect my life, doesn't reflect who I am. If I go to church again, I'm going to be told I have to fit a certain box and I'm too exhausted. I rather have lost faith in the sincerity of the intention and I think that when you get a group of human beings together, you've got to fit a box.

I find it very difficult to even go into a church these days. I go when I have to. I'm not going to make a social issue of it... I'm not going to make things difficult. But it's a matter of personal integrity now to not go near that. Because I know that if I walk in as who I am, there won't be space for me, I won't be accepted, there won't be a genuine acceptance. There might be lip service from a few.

### **8.3.2 Positive Church Experiences**

Whilst those with positive experiences of being bisexual in a church setting were in the clear minority, a number of respondents reported bi-affirming practices within their home congregations. Sandra's Anglican vicar in South Yorkshire frequently preached on LGBT-themed issues:

Our vicar recently did a really lovely sermon... she just made a reference to lesbian and gay and anyone on the spectrum in between, and she recognised it [bisexuality]. That was really nice. We've had some really good sermons. I can send you three. So there's a recognition there, within our church, that not everybody fits in the gay, straight or lesbian box, and there's actually a spectrum and people move along and people change.

Moira spoke of both the presence of, and affirmation of, bisexual people at her previous Anglican church in central London:

A very high percentage of the church congregation is LGBT and among the women, quite a high proportion identify as bi... there was no discrimination against or negative comments made against people being bisexual.

However, Moira did acknowledge that this church was located within 'one of the gayest parishes in the Church of England.'

Cat, who attends an Anglican church in London, felt welcome there, despite not worshipping at a particularly affirming church:

I've always been pretty open with those in leadership, although they've disagreed with same-sex relationships. Also because I've dated both men and women in the time I've been at my church, people in the congregation have met my partners of both genders, so they know that even if they don't understand that, it's because I'm bisexual.

They appreciate me being open and honest and respectful of their views – I've found that by not being secretive or defensive, reactions are usually kind enough. But now I'm engaged to a woman, most people assume I'm gay, so unless they actually know, they are reacting to me as a presumed gay woman.

Stephen was another bisexual Anglican who experienced no problems worshipping within the Church of England. Although he stated that his church was affirming of bisexual people, he did admit that it was not a subject that was given much consideration; in fact, most people assumed he was gay:

Most people there know that I'm in a same-sex relationship and I've never had any kind of negative response. The most I've had is surprise. It's not something I hide [bisexuality] but it's not necessarily something that comes up. I think most people... assume that I'm gay.

Interestingly, Susannah from the West Midlands found her Baptist church affirming of LGBT people, yet dismissive of mental health issues:

I've never felt any kind of direct biphobia or homophobia, and certainly not in the church. I mean, the Baptist denomination doesn't really have dogma in the way that

other denominations do – in general I’ve found them to be pretty liberal and open-minded places.

The minister that I had for the longest time, whom I loved and was just fantastic... I was out to her and there really wasn’t a problem. I felt comfortable in that environment, so that [sexuality] was never really an issue, but I did feel that my mental health was being dismissed. I just kept asking for help and nobody would help me.

Gillian spoke of the total affirmation she felt as a bisexual woman within the Metropolitan Community Church: ‘It’s not church where I had a problem with bisexuality. Church was where I went for refuge and understanding and I got it. Thank God for MCC!’

Kathryn, as mentioned previously in this chapter, described her church in West Yorkshire where Bi-visibility Day was celebrated within the main Sunday service. It was therefore not surprising to hear that:

It’s very openly inclusive of a lot of different types of people. But it’s nice because there’s straight cis people who go and there are people who aren’t cis, and there are lesbians and gay men and there are bisexual people and all manner. I know that our church marches at Pride and things like that, as well.

Now that I’ve found an inclusive church, I do not care about saying I’m bisexual at church. It’s so natural....

On the whole, though, it seemed that only certain ‘maverick’ Anglican Churches and bespoke LGBT affirming denominations such as MCC were proactively affirming of bisexual people. The majority exercised biphobia via stigmatisation or silence.

#### **8.4 Into the Future**

My final questions to participants focused on what would improve the Church experience for them and how they saw the Church proceeding in future, in terms of non-binary sexualities.

Robyn felt the Church of England had not kept pace with social and cultural change in terms of affirming the full spectrum of human sexuality, tending to avoid the issue rather than engage with it:

I think the Church is about fifty years behind the rest of the world... they just don’t know what to do. I think because there’s not been enough theological thinking on the way forward, because they don’t feel comfortable to talk about it. It’s become of those areas that it’s better to sweep under the carpet and not deal with it... there are some Christians who are starting to make noises now, perhaps those who are slightly more forward-thinking, but I think certainly the Church has got a long way to go.

I think because it's an issue it can't deal with, it spends a lot of time talking around the subject and never coming to any clear-cut solution. And I think that's been the case for some time... I think possibly it's aware now that it needs to be in the world and this is one of the areas in the world it just can't handle at the moment.

For Robyn, the focus was all wrong in the global church:

In an ideal world, it would be good if those issues were spoken about, but actually there shouldn't really be issues at all, should there?... I think, you know, things like ridding the world of poverty and hunger and everyone having clean water should be far more important.

Giles agreed that there was far too great an emphasis on human sexuality, which he believed to be a secondary or 'side issue.' Christology and the Gospel message should predominate, in his view:

Christian churches are not about that [sexuality] as far as I'm concerned... That's a side issue, as far as I'm concerned. Churches tearing themselves to pieces on this seems a bit silly. It's an agenda that doesn't have to be forced into the forum of the church as much as it is, really. The Uganda bishops make a huge thing about it and say how evil it is, but it's not the most important issue in Christianity. Christianity is all about original sin, redemption, resurrection, all this kind of thing... that issue shouldn't dominate all that church is about.

Adele shared Robyn's view that the church had failed to keep pace with society, resulting in a chasm between the church's perception of individuals and the actual reality of people's lives:

They don't seem to have got to grips with the idea at all [bi-/homosexuality]. They seem to be stuck maybe in the early 90s? They seem to have come to grips with the idea that maybe, yeah, same sex partnerships are happening, but that's as far as it goes, really, isn't it? I don't consider myself particularly well informed, but find myself having to sort of correct people's assumptions quite a lot... there seems to be a real understanding gap between what the church thinks people do and what they really do. I honestly don't know whether they'll get their heads around that stuff at all.

Sandra felt that more needed to be done to raise bisexual awareness in churches, and was willing to be part of this movement for change:

Churches on the whole don't think about the B in LGBT... I just think it's such an unexplored area, really... it's always the assumption that people are either gay or they're straight. I think bi people have got a lot to contribute to the discussion... making people realise that even when they think they are not homophobic, biphobic or heterosexist, they are!

Jane agreed on the issue of binary thinking: 'I kind of feel there's a lot of discussion about gay people. Like, what are they going to do about the gay people, that's basically what it is, isn't it?

There's very, very little of the LGBTQ thing.' Harry bemoaned the 'polarised approach' of both the church and the secular gay lobby, which prevented real dialogue taking place.

Susannah also remarked on the lack of verbal acknowledgement or awareness of middle sexualities:

I think that if the church is going to talk about relationships, which it should, because the church should have an awful lot to say about that, then they should remember not to say 'whether you're gay or straight,' which is a phrase that gets my back up, because I'm not.'

As Shanon from MCC commented in Chapter 6, there was a desperate need for clergy to be trained in non-binary human sexualities. Susannah, now an avowed atheist, felt passionate about this:

It would be good if there were guidelines and training that the ministers have if a young person comes up to them with questions about sexuality... that the minister knows that one of the possibilities is bi or pan or whatever... because that person might not know that. I think it's probably different these days with the internet, but I've heard people of my generation and older talk about the first time they came across the word bisexual, and it's like *ah*. And until you know it's a thing outside of yourself, it feels more problematic. And so the church, because ministers are people that are confided in and give advice and support on deeply personal matters, it's important that they are educated and aware, because the person that comes to them might not be that educated and need that 'well, have you thought about this, have you thought about that.' You hear so many stories of people growing up thinking they're straight, then having these different sex attractions and then having same sex attractions and thinking, 'oh my God, I must be gay.' And then try being gay for a while, but that doesn't fit either. If only we could tell everybody that at about eight, that bisexuality is a thing. We're not allowed to do that in schools, but we should be allowed to do that in churches.

Ali felt that the Church needed to take a lead in getting to grips with and promoting bisexuality as a valid orientation, but that this was unlikely to happen without pressure from within the LGBT faith community:

The problem I've found, is that the LGBT community isn't very good at dealing with bisexuals either. So even in churches where there's quite a lot of gay people, there's a weird sort of... not knowing what to do with people who identify as bisexual. The church could be able to take something of a lead in saying, 'actually this identity is as valid and important and as open to oppression as anything else. But I feel that if there isn't this pressure from the LGBT community, then...

Ravenna agreed that the church in general was in a muddle over sexual fluidity and bisexuality, and that bisexual views needed to be heard:

I think it's ridiculously confusing in the church to be bisexual. And that's why there needs to be lots more bi voices in the whole LGBTI conversation that's happening very loudly around, not just the Church of England, but the church in England.

Despite the pressure she felt to leave the evangelical church, Ravenna was determined to stay and effect change from within, to 'evangelise' for LGBT rights:

I don't want the church to go downhill and for people to find themselves on the wrong side of history. It's not just about me, it's about the church. I grew up in the evangelical church and for the most part, I love what the evangelical church stands for. I don't really want to see them go to hell in a handcart. And if I've got a voice, or at least can use the voice I've got in a way that might help, then I will do. I'm an evangelical Christian... I want the church to change... I've got a degree in theology and a big mouth, and I'm not afraid to use it!

Jane did point to the positive impact of Ruth Hunt, the Chief Executive of Stonewall, who identifies as Christian as well as LGBT and has recently set out to improve Stonewall's track record on bisexual rights:

I have kind of high hopes of Ruth at Stonewall, because I know she's a Christian... I know Ruth is now very out at Stonewall at being a Christian and is working quite hard with Christian groups to make them less homophobic, biphobic and transphobic.

Cat felt it was vital that bisexual Christians themselves spoke out about their sexuality. When asked what would improve church for her, she replied:

People understanding that bisexuality does not mean unfaithfulness or promiscuity, nor does it mean being fickle, changeable or indecisive. More people being willing to be open about being bisexual, even after settling down with one person, so that others see that it's a legitimate orientation and not a sign of immaturity or adultery.

It would greatly assist matters, in Cat's view, if the Church of England's *Issues in Human Sexuality* (Church of England, 1991) provided a less damaging definition of bisexuality, that gave 'an accurate portrayal of the bisexual orientation, even if the teaching on same sex relationships doesn't change.' Moira agreed, particularly in light of the fact that candidates for ordination had to swear to stand by its contents: 'This is quite an old report now, and is being used for a purpose it was never designed for. It has a very skewed opinion or view of what bisexual is.' Justin wondered: 'If I go forward for ordination, will I be able to sign that?'

Ravenna shared Cat's view that bisexuals needed to speak out within the church and not outside of it, for change to happen:

I think if you're in a position to be able to stay in an evangelical church, then we need to... If there are those of us in there who are strong, who are out and proud, who know who we are, who are willing to be those voices, we need to be those voices. Because otherwise all people are going to hear is, 'you're going to have to be celibate for the rest of your life or you're not welcome here.' And both of those things are the worst things that can be shown to people.

Amelia was not interested in being affirmed by the church as a bisexual; it was an apology she desired:

I have a slight issue with LGBT affirming churches, which is that I don't want the church to affirm me. I don't want to be told that a gay bishop is as good as a straight one, or a female bishop is as good as a male one. I actually want an apology from the church. I actually want some acknowledgement from the church of how badly they've treated LGBT people... Because I think, 'you've done so much damage, and I don't trust you until you apologise for it.'

Claudia also alluded to the condescension of the Church towards LGBT Christians:

I hear a lots of anti-gay Christians use the term 'disagree well' but what they show in practice is 'respect my right to have my view as I look down on you, knowing you're wrong and a bad Christian, and I'm right and a real Christian.'

Gillian felt that LGBT women in particular had been done a disservice by the patriarchal traditions of the church and called for women to be authentic in their faith and sexuality:

What church should do for women, is stop peddling this nonsense of sacrifice. God didn't make us with desires and wants and needs for us to put other people's first. We can help others, but only in the measure we help ourselves. We have to own who we are and live that. We can still be excellent mothers and be bisexual. We can still be excellent church members and be who we are.

Others pointed to the fact that increasingly more young people did not identify as heterosexual, which clearly posed a problem to an institution steeped in binary thought systems. Ravenna commented:

... the vast majority, particularly of young people these days, of course, are identifying as 'not straight' – whatever that might be. So I think that the Church needs to acknowledge that there are going to be bisexual people within their pews. And it's more than just a trend. It's not like they're going, 'Lady Gaga's bisexual, so I must be.'

Chris felt that churches of all denominations were stymied by bisexuality for a whole range of reasons:

Even though I attend a radical LGBT affirming church, it doesn't tackle the issues of bisexuality in any depth, or how this relates to faith... in other churches, it is not that leaders openly condemn it, but rather it gets ignored. Why? Perhaps they are too



scared to address the issue, perhaps they think the issue is too divisive. Perhaps because they know that the rest of society has moved on, and no longer adopts the traditional view of sexuality. Or perhaps they are scared of losing their job? Whatever the reason, we need to get over it.

For Stephen, as an Anglican, what would improve his church experience was quite simple: 'Being able to get married.'

## **8.5 Conclusion**

Chapters 7 and 8 document the experiences, both positive and negative, of bisexual Christians in the UK within a faith context. Chapter 7 highlighted how bisexual Christians understood their sexual identities and how they reconcile their faith and sexuality, including attitudes to non-monogamy. Chapter 7 also considered the mental health of bisexual Christians to ascertain whether recent research on poor bisexual health was equally applicable to people of faith. It was determined that whilst bisexual Christians experienced extremely elevated rates of depressive illnesses (89%), the factors behind poor mental health were not necessarily related to the typical dual bisexual stressors of identity erasure and stigmatisation. Often other factors came into play that were not exclusive to bisexual people.

Chapter 8 looked at the experiences of bisexual Christians in churches and other places of worship and support. Here it was notable that negative church experiences vastly outnumbered positive ones. It was also abundantly clear that churches and Christian organisations of all denominations had little idea how to tackle bisexuality, with the result that the B in LGBT was all but erased in documentation, sermons and other faith communications.

Few saw the church addressing bisexuality in the short-term future and overall a bleak picture was painted of a global faith community steeped in binary thought processes and outmoded pastoral and liturgical practices.



## **Part III**



## CHAPTER 9

### Bi-affirming Pastors and Educators in the US

This chapter considers how bisexuality and bisexual people are treated by the major denominations in the United States, based on interviews from Research Cell 3: Pastors and Educators of Bisexual People in the US. As with Chapter 6: *Bi-Affirming Pastors and Educators in the UK*, interviewees represented three main organisational bodies: churches, LGBT church satellite groups and therapeutic practice (secular or faith-based). In addition, I also interviewed the Bisexual Resource Center in Boston and Believe Out Loud!, an ecumenical LGBT educational and campaigning group based in Manhattan.

**Appendix 9** provides a brief background to some of the major Christian denominations in the USA and their policies on human sexuality, as they impact on bisexual people<sup>130</sup>, as a means of informing subsequent chapters on bisexual pastors, educators and Christians in the USA. I have also included several denominations which may be considered either minority (e.g. Metropolitan Community Church) or multi-faith (Unitarian, Quakers), as a number of participants were members of these traditions.

As with Research Cells 1 and 2 (Chapters 6-8), theoretical analysis of participants' responses has been left to Chapter 13: *Discussion and Concluding Thoughts*. This is again due to the sheer volume of valuable data gathered from a sizeable survey of pastors and educators. Also specific to this research cell was the sheer number of participants who themselves identified as bisexual, providing a valuable insight as both providers and users of bisexual support services.

#### 9.1 Cell 3 (RC3) Participants

As with Chapter 6, it was my intention in this research cell to cover a broad range of bisexual pastoral practice, this time in the US. I therefore interviewed pastors from most of the major

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<sup>130</sup> Whilst a great deal is written about marriage equality in comparing church traditions, this is not the focus of this research project, unless it concerns the rights of bisexual clergy and laity.

denominations in the US – where access was granted - as well as leaders of support groups (both Christian and secular), bisexual writers, activists and psychotherapists. I also sought to cover a range of ages and States, to ensure generational and cultural variations were accounted for. See **Chapter 5** for further details of my methodological approach; the list of prepared questions for participants in RC1 & 3 can be found in **Appendix 3**.

The table overleaf lists the participants in RC3. As with Research Cell 1, a number of ex-gay ministries and fundamentalist churches were approached for interview, but the majority refused (See email correspondence in **Appendix 5**). The sole pastor willing to be interviewed was Pastor Ron Woolsey of The Narrow Way Ministry, though only by questionnaire.

In terms of sexual orientation, five identified as gay men ( $n=5$ ), two identified as lesbian ( $n=2$ ), three identified as bisexual male ( $n=3$ ), six identified as bisexual female ( $n=6$ ), two identified as queer ( $n=2$ ) and one participant identified as heterosexual male (formerly gay) ( $n=1$ ). In terms of ethnicity, eighteen participants were Caucasian with one Latino. Two participants identified as Jewish. In terms of religiosity, three claimed to be atheist or 'not religious' ( $n=3$ ). Whilst I did have some email correspondence with a bisexual person of colour, the general inability to attract bisexual pastors or educators could be down to the tendency of black pastors to be affiliated to conservative denominations and faith traditions such as the Northern Baptist Convention<sup>131</sup> or the African Methodist Episcopal Church, or to not be out as bisexual due to the enhanced stigmatization of this particular intersectional identity (Comstock, 2008).

The aim of this research cell was to establish existing pastoral provision towards bisexual people of faith and to uncover good inclusive practices where these existed. This was with the objective of working towards a clearer understanding of how bisexual Christians are, or might be, integrated into faith communities.

The participants in Research Cell 3 are listed overleaf in **Table 9.1**.

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<sup>131</sup> See <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/07/27/the-most-and-least-racially-diverse-u-s-religious-groups/>

*Table 9.1. RC3: Bi-affirming Pastors and Educators in the US*

	<b>Name</b>	<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Interview Format</b>
301	Alison Amyx	Believe Out Loud!	Face to Face
302	James Rowe	Believe out Loud!	Face to Face
303	Kate Estrop	Bisexual Resource Center	Face to Face
304	Julia Kenfield	Bisexual Resource Center	Face to Face
305	Michael Monroe	Bisexual Resource Center	Face to Face
306	Robyn Ochs	Bisexual Activist	Face to Face
307	Marie Alford-Harkey	The Religious Institute	Face to Face
308	Eliel Cruz	Bisexual Activist	Skype Video
309	Dr Beth Firestein	Author & Psychologist	Skype Video
310	Michael Salas	Vantage Point Counselling	Skype Video
311	Pastor Ron Woolsey	The Narrow Way Ministry	Questionnaire
312	Rev. Janet Edwards	More Light Presbyterian Church	Skype Video
313	Rev. Layton Williams	Presbyterian Church USA	Skype Video
314	Rev. Colleen Darraugh	Metropolitan Community Church	Face to Face
315	Rev. James Campbell	United Church of Christ	Face to Face
316	Rev. Neil Cazares-Thomas	Cathedral of Hope (UCC)	Face to Face
317	Rev. Todd Scoggins	Cathedral of Hope (UCC)	Face to Face
318	Rev. Connor Gwyn	Episcopal Church	Skype Video
319	Dr Lisa Diamond	Academic, University of Utah	Skype Video

## **9.2 RC3 Coding Categories**

Initial and detailed coding of the interviews revealed the following categories, outlined in **Table 9.2** overleaf. These interviews were coded independently of their UK equivalent research cell to ensure the findings remained grounded in the data. So while there is some duplication or overlap in coding categories between Research Cells 1 and 3, this simply reflects the global

issues faced by bisexual people rather than any inherent bias on the part of the researcher towards the data.

*Table 9.2. RC 3: Coding Categories*

Main Category	Sub-category
Unique Situation in US (9.3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Influence of Marriage Equality</li> <li>• Influence of Bathroom Bill</li> <li>• Effects of overt binary culture</li> </ul>
Definitions of bisexuality (9.4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conceptual understandings of bisexuality</li> </ul>
Concepts of the Divine (9.5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• God as bisexual and Jesus as Queer?</li> <li>• God as affirming/non-affirming of bisexuality</li> </ul>
Affirming Practices (9.6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nature of organisation</li> <li>• Motivation for affirming practices</li> <li>• Methods of affirmation</li> <li>• Affirming church denominations</li> </ul>
Obstacles to Bisexual Affirmation (9.7)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stigmatisation</li> <li>• Identity Erasure/Invisibility</li> <li>• Horizontal oppression</li> <li>• Non affirming church denominations and fundamentalist practices</li> </ul>
Mental Health (10.1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bi erasure &amp; the struggle for legitimacy</li> <li>• Horizontal oppression</li> <li>• Biphobia</li> <li>• The Revolving Closet Door</li> <li>• Activist burnout</li> <li>• Shame (male)</li> </ul>
Attitudes to Non-Monogamy (10.2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is Polyamory a bisexual issue?</li> <li>• Affirmative attitudes to Polyamory</li> <li>• Negative attitudes to Polyamory</li> </ul>
The Future (10.3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategies for progressing the conversation</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Removing horizontal oppression</li> <li>• Reducing the distance between lay and clergy attitudes to LGBT</li> <li>• Self-reflective practice</li> <li>• Bringing sex &amp; sexuality to the dinner table</li> </ul>
Conclusion (10.4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Concluding thoughts</li> </ul>

### 9.3 The Unique Situation in the US (2016)

At the time of interviewing participants in Research Cell 3 (February- August 2016), several socio-political developments in the US dominated the headlines and proved to have a significant impact on how bisexuality was framed within LGBT identity politics. Before discussing these, it is perhaps necessary to consider the cultural backdrop to religious life in the US.

#### 9.3.1 An overtly binary nation

As indicated in *Chapter 9: Bisexuality and the Church in the USA*, religious life is deeply polarised in the US in terms of LGBT affirmation, with little middle ground (Miller, 2016). This was reflected in the American public's attitudes to human sexuality.

Michael Salas, an LGBT psychotherapist with Vantage Point Counselling Services in Dallas, commented: 'I think people are very polar. People like to think in extremes. I think people have a hard time thinking there could be a lot of other sexual variables in terms of where sexual attraction goes.'

This was underlined by Reverend Dr Neil Cazares-Thomas, Senior Pastor and Director of the Cathedral of Hope (UCC) in Dallas. Reverend Cazares-Thomas, himself a graduate of Winchester University, is a British priest based in the US, and as such, offers a useful perspective on the comparative church cultures. He remarked:

In some ways, I think the B is not only ignored, but is also feared in our alphabet soup. More so than the T, and if that's true, then they really are the marginalised piece of the LGBT. And I think a lot of that is to do with the systems of binaries that we have bought

into, especially here in the United States. It's been a while since I've been entrenched in England, but certainly here in the United States, everything is in binaries: black and white, straight and gay. The binaries are so well established, and I believe they've been established for good political reason – to ensure that people don't come to the table. [It's] just so reinforced in this culture, that anything that is seen beyond those binaries is marginalised beyond marginalised, and ignored.

Michael Monroe, a trustee of the Bisexual Resource Center in Boston, felt that not even the binary was assumed, though, pointing to the link between religious tradition in the United States and heteronormativity:

American culture has this big default to religion. The President has to say God bless this, that, and the other thing, and we've never had an atheist or an outwardly atheist president or anything like that. So there's such momentum behind defaults, one of which is belief in God is presumed unless you state otherwise, heterosexuality is presumed, unless you state otherwise.

Bisexual activist, Robyn Ochs, commented on the fundamentalism and absolutism that dominated American religious life and indeed people's lives in general:

The US is a very fundamentalist kind of place... some of the religions in the United States are very absolute. You're either in or you're out. You're in, or you're excluded... to choose to be public and out often means not just ceasing to go to the specific church you go to, but it can also mean losing your whole social community... the cost to people is unimaginable.

This can be seen both in this chapter and the following chapter with particular regard to Latter-day Saints and Seventh-day Adventists.

Marie Alford-Harkey, President of the Religious Institute (a non-denominational think-tank) and author of *Bisexuality: Making the Invisible Visible in Faith Communities* (2014), the one and only bisexual pastoral guide for churches, remarked on the intellectual binary created by the media:

The media plays up constantly this sort of 'religion is intolerant and smart people aren't'... always like there's religious people and enlightened people. So we're really trying to change that conversation and remind them that there are literally millions of people of faith who support these issues and ready to do this work.

### **9.3.2 Marriage Equality**

Several participants pointed to the negative effect of marriage equality legislation on bisexual rights. Whilst marriage equality had made homosexual relationships more palatable to the general public, with even 90% LGBT congregations such as the Cathedral of Hope seeing an influx of heterosexual couples with children, it also served to further marginalise non-monosexual sexual identities, as well as polyamorous relationship configurations (see 10.11).

Reverend Colleen Darraugh, Lead Pastor of the affirming Metropolitan Community Church in Dallas, felt that marriage equality had further cemented institutional relationship models, and reinforced the marginalisation of bisexual people and other non-binary sexual identities:

People have fought so hard to have equal marriage between two people... people have had an investment in it being two people, do you know what I mean? ... I think people are still celebrating that victory and aren't ready to move on and be more progressive... I think part of it is the psychological fight for acceptance, so accepting an institutional model that pre-existed and then trying to show, 'See, see, we can be married and have relationships of many, many years!' ... we're still in that place of celebrating that.

This view was shared by Reverend Todd Scoggins, Associate Pastor of the Cathedral of Hope (UCC), who called it the 'June and Ward Cleaver<sup>132</sup> syndrome from the 50s' where gay couples mimic heterosexual suburban respectability with their white picket fences and cute puppies.

Professor Lisa Diamond of Utah University, a specialist in bisexuality, concurred:

... the American gay marriage debate was about: look at us, we're just like you, we're identical to you. We have these little children sitting on our laps. And look us making dinner, we are absolutely exactly the same!

### **9.3.3 Bathroom bills**

Legislation preventing transgender youth and adults from accessing the public bathroom of their choice focused attention on transgender issues.<sup>133</sup> While this focus on the 'T' in LGBT would appear to make a welcome change from the hitherto exclusive emphasis on lesbian and

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<sup>132</sup> June and Ward Cleaver were the 1950s baby boomer parents in US Sitcom 'Leave it to Beaver' which ran from 1957-1963.

<sup>133</sup> See [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2016/04/19/north-carolinas-bathroom-bill-looks-to-be-hurting-pat-mccrorys-political-future/?utm\\_term=.164366d62058](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2016/04/19/north-carolinas-bathroom-bill-looks-to-be-hurting-pat-mccrorys-political-future/?utm_term=.164366d62058)

gay issues, it nevertheless served to further marginalise the bisexual community in the eyes of several of those interviewed.

James Rowe, CEO of Believe Out Loud!, ‘an online network that empowers Christians to work for justice for LGBTQ people,’ acknowledged:

It’s a challenge, because there’s not a lot of people talking about bi. I would say finally there is a lot of people talking about trans rights, but the bisexual community is still not getting the attention and the resources that this community deserves.

The reasons for this, in Rowe’s view, are found under section 10.7, *Obstacles to Bisexual Affirmation*. This view was candidly acknowledged by Reverend James Campbell, pastor of a large LGBT affirming United Church of Christ congregation in New York: ‘I’m not sure we actually do that much for bisexual people. We have more of an emphasis at this point on transgender people.’

#### **9.4 Definitions of Bisexuality**

It was clear that participants within this cell were by and large sensitive to non-binary conceptualisations of middle sexualities, with the exception of Pastor Ron Woolsey of The Narrow Way Ministry, who stated: ‘A bisexual person would be one who is sexually attracted to either gender and perhaps indulges in sexual intimacy with both.’

Reverend James Campbell (UCC) also defined bisexuality in terms of the gender binary, but acknowledged his own ignorance of the complexities of middle sexualities:

I guess the most basic definition in my own thinking, is a person who is sexually attracted and emotionally attracted to people of both genders. I don’t know that a person has to act on that to be bisexual, and I should imagine not, as that makes it all about sex. But I guess I understand it as being hardwired in some way to be attracted to, drawn to, people of both sexes, or intersex people... it’s in their DNA, they are attracted to both. And who that person settles with, it’s about that person, and not about that person’s sex.

Bisexual activist Robyn Ochs unsurprisingly quoted her own well-known definition:

I call myself bisexual because I acknowledge that I have in myself the potential to be attracted – romantically and/or sexually – to people of more than one sex and/or

gender, not necessarily at the same time, not necessarily in the same way, and not necessarily to the same degree.

She explicated further:

When I use the word bisexual, the bi for me in bisexual is being attracted to people whose gender is similar to mine and people whose genders are different. And that's a non-binary definition, an intentionally non-binary framing.

Marie Alford-Harkey, Director of the Religious Institute, quoted the definition used in her book, *Bisexuality: Making the Invisible Visible in Faith Communities*: 'I like the version that's in the book: enduring attraction to people of more than one sex or gender. It's a short version [of Robyn Ochs' quote].'

Michael Salas, an LGBT psychotherapist with Vantage Point Counselling in Dallas, highlighted some of the complexities associated with the bisexual identity, from both a generational and a situational perspective. He drew a link between these complexities and the relatively few self-identified bisexual people who had accessed his counselling service:

I think it's generational. I think millennials identify more with gender fluidity. I don't think they like the labels, so they're open to having a sexual experience or even a relationship with someone of the same sex, but they don't understand the need for the label bisexuality. I think that for a lot of people who are bisexual, a lot of them are in straight relationships – maybe they don't feel the need to point that out to others.

On the whole though, it was clear that the majority of those interviewed conceptualised bisexuality as a diverse and complex intersectional sexual orientation, enabling me to engage in fairly nuanced and in-depth discussions of the problems faced by both bisexual Christians and those who pastor them. As Robyn Ochs noted: 'I believe in intersectionality. I think to assume that there's one experience of bisexuality that we can really identify and pinpoint would blind us to the reality of people's experience.'

## **9.5 Concepts of the Divine**

I was also interested in finding out how participants in this cell viewed the divine in relation to bisexuality, as I saw this as predicative of affirming or non-affirming pastoral practices. It was also made clear to me by a number of participants (notably Beth Firestein and Robyn Ochs)

that religion was a clear factor in bisexual self-awareness and experience. Robyn Ochs commented:

It's important to... keep in mind that religion is a very strong driver of people's experience and often shapes their beliefs about sex and sexuality. It often shapes the traditions and values of their home... From my experience of speaking to actual people, because I've been speaking publicly for 31 years, I come across people whose experience is profoundly different from mine... and often one of the largest differences is religion and spirituality.

It was clear that Pastor Ron Woolsey – the only conservative evangelical willing to engage with my research project - saw God as compassionate and forgiving of sin, yet felt that believers must turn away from sin to access God:

Through our personal testimonies of 'coming out' of LGBT life practice, and through the presentation of God's word in which is great power, transforming power, we teach in this order: God's unconditional love, His conditional acceptance based upon surrender of the will, acknowledging one's need of being saved from the sin of bisexuality (LGBT or whatever the sin issue), contrition and repentance, discipleship (which involves self-denial and self-discipline), transformation of character, and victory over sin, all through applying Biblical principles and practices. This, of course, flies in the face of conventional thinking and political correctness, modern day psychiatry and psychology and social science, all of which overlook the miracle working power of God.

Living a 'LGBT life' was, in Woolsey's view, sinful:

If a bisexual is a Christian, then he/she should follow God's original plan in which a man should leave his father and mother and cleave unto his wife. There should be one and only one sexual partner, and that partner should be within a marriage union. God can bless that. But He cannot bless any union that is a perversion of what He created in the beginning – the sacred marriage institution of one man with one woman... The LGBT life is not in harmony with the expressed will of God... the formula for health, happiness and a sound mind is found in following God's plan.

Unsurprisingly, given the demographic interviewed, the remaining participants had a more affirming view of the divine. Marie Alford-Harkey did not see God as operating from a binary concept of justice:

Both as a pastor or as the President of the Religious Institute, that is not a frame from which I operate... that is not my theology of what God looks like, some kind of judge, this is right and this is wrong. If only it was that easy.

Author and psychologist Beth Firestein believed that belief in a loving, non-judgmental God was key to sexual wholeness in the clients she saw:

The primary consideration that has helped me come to wholeness, and the other clients I have worked with, is to experience God as love, whether this is channeled through a female body or a male body, or with same, biologically similar body or a different... I guess for me, the fundamental shift and what I'm trying to nurture in my clients, is to really ask them to be investigative about what is their concept of God. Do they really believe in God as a loving and accepting force/theme that is about love? And do they experience their own same and other sex attractions to also be expressions of love? And just holding them to think through that for themselves.

Coming back to wholeness, coming back to integration of a bisexual identity within an active religion, practice or belief system, definitely I think... the essence of God is a loving God. It's humans judging same-sex relationships, not God.

Reverend Janet Edwards, a senior figure in the More Light Presbyterian Church, saw an alignment between her bisexuality and the nature of God:

The greatest blessing is that when I claim to be bisexual, I'm not just claiming it about physical feelings that I have... it's really about my whole self. I think it's really a blessing to have a bi approach to the world. What it is, is a both/and approach, rather than an either/or. It's a capacity to see... to move between sides in a way that seems very difficult to many people. And the fact of the matter for me, is that it is closer to what the nature of God is, because God is bi or God is poly in nature. He's male and female. It starts as being closer to being the image of God, in my view, and in seeing the world as God sees the world, than other people have. And that's a real blessing.

For Rev. Edwards, there were clear bisexual role models in Scripture, as well as a sense of bisexuality about the deity:

I certainly think King David was bisexual... he loved Bathsheba, but he loved Jonathan. At the very centre of the Old Testament and at the height of the importance in the Old Testament is a bisexual person... the notion of God being bi at least – God too is on a bell curve and that comes across in Scripture, too.

The notion of Jesus as a queer figure, an 'outcast' separate from 'the folk in the centre' was also noted by Rev. Edwards. Similarly, Rev. Neil Cazares-Thomas (UCC) speaks of a 'transgender' God, who 'transgresses' and his 'counter-cultural' son: 'That's the gospel we believe in, a gospel of transgression... everything about Jesus was counter-cultural.'

Bisexual activist, Eliel Cruz, did not see God or Jesus as sexualised beings, either in spirit or body, but as simply as affirming and present within the LGBT faithful:

I think that because LGBT people are part of the body of Christ, that the body of Christ is there. I don't see them expressing themselves sexually in the way we do, that doesn't come into my theology. It doesn't connect with me in that way.

As a non-practising 'cultural' Jew, Robyn had a positive but humanist view of Christ, though it was the social justice aspects of her Jewish upbringing that informed her duty of care to LGBT people: 'I'm not a Christian, I was not raised that way... I don't believe in the God part of it at all, but I think as a person, he (Jesus) is a good role model, a wonderful role model.'

## **9.6 Affirming Practices**

In this section, the motivation, methods and media behind affirming practices are discussed. A particular focus is given here to specific organisations I visited during my research trip to Dallas, New York and Boston in May 2016.

Believe Out Loud! in New York is, in the words of its then President, James Rowe: 'an online network that empowers Christians to work for justice for LGBTQ people.' As Senior Communications Strategist, Alison Amyx, explained with regard to the organisation:

It was based on some research that said, if you could get mainline Protestant clergy to affirm LGBTQ people, then it would be a massive shift in culture in the United States that would lead to affirmation of all LGBTQ people and Christians... we have found that's really true.

While this work mainly entails training and empowering clergy to employ affirming practices within their home congregations, as well as campaigning work around current issues, such as the Bathroom Bill in North Carolina, Believe Out Loud! also give lay voices a social media platform for expressing their feelings and experiences. It is in this area that Believe Out Loud! have brought visibility to bisexual Christians. As Alison Amyx explained:

Our main mode of communication is to lift up stories from individuals from across the movement who are experiencing the journey of being a person of faith and also LGBTQ. So we do the same with bisexuality; we lift up stories from bisexual Christians and also just bring visibility around bisexuality to our network. So that can be both on our blog or then also through our Facebook page. We're lifting up memes and other pictures and things that lift up stories of bisexuals and bisexual Christians... from places like Tumblr, because Tumblr is really a place where a lot of people gather who have



identities that are marginalised in one way. So we lift up mems and pictures to say bisexuality is not a phase. Bisexuality exists. I am bisexual. I've been bisexual for ten years. And I'm not getting over that. You know, things that say bisexual is real, bisexuality needs to be taken seriously. With that said, we are not as good as we could be, and I know that.

Alison conceded that they could be 'lifting up more stories' and indicated that Believe Out Loud!'s blogger payment system had been set up for precisely that reason, and had proven key in attracting bisexual people to their website, thereby further increasing bivisibility in the LGBT faith community and beyond:

I think part of our blogger payment programme is to incentivise folks to write who are in underrepresented communities. And I think of bisexuality as one of those communities. So our blogger payment programme commendates [those] who are writing about identities and experiences that are under-represented either on Believe Out Loud!'s content or in the LGBTQ movement, and I think bisexuality is really close to the top of that list.

It was clear that Alison was keen to increase visibility of bisexual people, despite not historically identifying as bisexual herself. This was an intentional goal, motivated in part by some negative press concerning the organisation's commitment to the B in LGBTQ, but also by a sense of bisexuality making a return as a valid sexual identity:

Somebody tweeted us once, when we posted a job description, and they said 'bisexuals needn't apply for this position, because Believe Out Loud! is really horrible at covering bisexuality. I don't remember the word that they used, but it was not just Believe Out Loud! needs help, but Believe Out Loud! is like really awful at this! I try not to be defensive, because I know in some ways it's true. And I also keep in the back of my mind that we can do better, we can do better, we can do better. When I first came in, I did a lot of work to lift up trans stories, stories from trans Christians. And I think that I need to do that same kind of work with bisexual people as well, bisexual Christians... It really comes through outreach, and I think having the blogger payment programme really helps, because you're not just asking people to do a public service, you're offering them money to write about their experiences... Outreach is the most important part, because it's saying to people, we want to hear your stories.

These stories are accessed by clicking on a bespoke bisexual tab on the website. In terms of printed resources, that was not something Believe Out Loud! offered as an online community. However, as President James Rowe pointed out, their online presence provides 'a good opportunity... to actually have these conversations online, which makes it easier for people to go and have these conversations in person or in their churches.'

In terms of personal motivation, James felt that Believe Out Loud! was addressing the historic shortfall in affirming Christian attitudes towards LGBT people:

I think professionally, I like to see Believe Out Loud! as being the best of the Christian voice. It's what I aspire to be and it's the voice that I am continually aspiring to be... one of the reasons I love this job so much, is because not only do I feel that it's impacting the LGBT community, but I think it's also impacting the Christian community as well. And I think that's equally as important because I think Christianity, especially in the 80s and 90s, as a result of AIDS, definitely suffered and, you know, has a lot of ground to make up for it as a result.

Whilst the organisation felt it could improve its bisexual provision, it was comparatively doing a great deal more bespoke work round bvisibility than other Christian campaigning groups and affirming churches I encountered. I also found their self-reflective practices and commitment to improve both their service and the lives of bisexual Christians commendable. As James Rowe conceded: 'There's so much education that has to happen, it's almost overwhelming.'

I also visited the offices of the Bisexual Resource Center in Boston, the main resource and training hub for bisexual people in the United States. Working out of a tiny room in shared office facilities, funding was a constant issue for the BRC, which has existed since 1985 and was incorporated in 1989 – though trustee Michael Monroe stated that was not in reaction to the HIV/AIDS crisis. In common with Believe Out Loud!, much of its support work takes place online, although it also has a publishing arm. As Co-President Kate Estrop explained: 'We have been providing local resources, local support groups since that time, and also now, especially do most of our support and education online with our website, our Twitter, Tumblr, Facebook pages.'

Treasurer Julia Kenfield noted with regard to printed resources:

We provide different resources nationwide as well as internationally. We publish two anthologies, *Getting Bi: Voices of Bisexuals Around the World*<sup>134</sup> and *Recognising Voices of Bisexual Men*<sup>135</sup> and we also distribute various leaflets and brochures, which is on books about bisexuality, how to be a good ally.

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<sup>134</sup> Ochs, R., & Rowley, S. E. (2005). *Getting bi: Voices of bisexuals around the world*. Boston, MA: Bisexual Resource Center.

<sup>135</sup> Ochs, R., & Williams, H. S. (2014). *Recognize: The voices of bisexual men*. Boston: Bisexual Resource Center.

The BRC also has a visible presence at Boston Pride and other local Pride events as well as collaborating with other national bisexual networks, like BiNet USA. In terms of local support, the organisations runs a number of support groups, such as one for bisexual youth and one for bisexual women married to straight men, which had proved invaluable to members.

In terms of social media campaigns, one of the BRC's flagship achievements was Bisexual Health Awareness month, now in its third year. That said, Treasurer Julia Kenfield was keen to point out the positive aspects of the bisexual community in Boston and further afield:

I always worry when we talk about health disparities, that we portray the bi community as being inherently sick or ill or damaged or broken – it can't be fixed. I personally feel that the bi community for me is beautiful and wonderful and diverse and giving and yes, just a really fantastic community. And I think that there's a lot of things that we can do on a wider level to support and nurture the community as well, and give the community the services and the programmes and the funding and the love and respect it deserves. I think it's not so much that we're inherently sick, but that we've been marginalised and discriminated against as a community.

Bisexual campaigner and educator, Robyn Ochs, is also based in Boston, and edited the two bisexual books mentioned above as well as the *Bi Women Quarterly*.<sup>136</sup> As well as speaking extensively on bisexual issues around the United States and further afield, she is a board member of the intentionally titled Mass Equality, a state-wide LGBTQ advocacy group. Robyn highlighted her Jewish upbringing, rather than her own experiences of marginalisation as a bisexual woman, as key to her desire to advocate for bisexual rights and marriage equality:

I grew up in a Judaism steeped in social justice – *tikkun olam* - the healing of the world. I love that, the whole idea that we're responsible to take action. I have faith. It's not faith in a specific higher being... I do believe in a higher power than myself, but for me, it's the power of community. I believe that community can do things that individuals can't.

In this way, Robyn's spirituality is not too far removed from the liberation theology outlined in Chapter 4. She acknowledged that this was one branch of theology she had studied:

When I think of my faith, I think of the idea that I take responsibility for trying to leave this world a better place than when I found it. I make the world a better place as a result of my presence. And I guess that's how I impact individual people and maybe how I impact, you know, larger social or material issues... I guess that's where my Judaism ties in, the whole idea of responsibility. The way I was raised Jewish was... one voice doesn't make a harmony. This piece of trash on the ground, don't walk past, pick

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<sup>136</sup> See <http://biwomenquarterly.com/>

it up... where you can make an impact, it's your responsibility to try. That's my faith, my spirituality, as it were.

I also interviewed the President of the Religious Institute and author of *Bisexuality: Invisible Visible in Faith Communities* (2014), Marie Alford-Harkey. Although the Religious Institute's remit is multi-faith, its focus is, like Believe Out Loud!, on equipping leaders to share an LGBTQ affirming message with their congregations, and on influencing the public debate around LGBTQ issues:

Our organisation is a multi-faith national non-profit. We work primarily with Christians, Unitarian Universalists and Jews, with some progressive Muslims, but mostly progressive Muslim leaders – we don't have a whole lot of progressive Muslim people of faith in our network... our mission has been from the beginning to work with religious institutions, so the institutional church... we're working with the places that do the most harm, in a lot of ways. So we do the inward... but we also do outward facing work, trying to change the discussion about religion and sexuality in the public.

Marie cited the financial support of the American Institute of Bisexuality as key to the success of *Bisexuality: Making the Invisible Visible in Faith Communities* (2014) and their training workshops. The AIB, in Marie's words, 'get that this is... life-changing work.' The book published by the Religious Institute was cited by a number of those interviewed as representing a valuable and unique contribution to the bisexual faith community. Activist Eliel Cruz stated: 'That's the only thing out there, honestly. I think it's the first thing that's about bisexuality and theology. There's a lot of stuff about bisexual spirituality, but not theology.'<sup>137</sup>

Pastor Ron Woolsey of The Narrow Way Ministry, on the other hand, saw his service to the bisexual community in terms of Christian mission:

LGBT visitors to our churches are treated with love and compassion and respect. However, we view them as a mission field, as sinners in need of their Saviour, just as the rest of us. Salvation is to be from sin, not in Sin.

One publicly-known opponent of such conservative evangelicalism is bisexual activist, Eliel Cruz. Famed within the LGBTQ faith community for his YouTube videos on being bisexual and Christian, as well as his Faithfully LGBT Twitter campaign, Eliel remains a Seventh-day Adventist, despite the SDA Church's best attempts to silence him. Eliel commented on his motivation behind the YouTube videos: 'I started doing YouTube because I wanted to start engaging with a younger audience. I wanted them to know that you can be both bisexual and

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<sup>137</sup> E.g. Kolodny (2000)

Christian and lead a happy life.’ When I asked Eliel if he felt you could be happy as a bisexual Christian, he replied: ‘Absolutely.’

Another participant in this research cell who uses the internet to raise bivisibility is Reverend Janet Edwards. Janet Edwards did not only contribute heavily to *Bisexuality: Making the Invisible Visible in Faith Communities* (2014), she was also the first bisexual Christian to write for Believe Out Loud!: ‘I think I was possibly the first American bisexual Christian voice out there on the internet. There are others now, of course, but I started that some years ago. Anyway, I have a certain notoriety.’

For another Presbyterian pastor, Reverend Layton Williams (Presbyterian Church USA), her own visibility as an openly bisexual Christian has influenced others to acknowledge bisexuality alongside gay and lesbian – though this quote is also rather telling of the lack of credence allowed, or awareness of, bisexual issues up to that point:

The senior pastor at the church where I work, when she mentions anything related to being gay or lesbian, she also mentions bisexual, and I know that she never did that before. She said to people that it never occurred to her to think about it before, but.... Knowing that people like me are in the church makes her do it.

Creating a safe space for everyone to feel welcome was a concept expressed by Reverend Colleen Darraugh, Lead Pastor of the Metropolitan Community Church of Dallas:

Metropolitan Community Church is about creating a safe space for worship for all people. It’s an inclusive church. It has been active in human rights, not just only in the US but around the world.

I asked Rev. Darraugh how MCC differed from other affirming denominations. She replied that MCC was the original welcoming place for lesbian and gay Christians; others like UCC had simply followed suit, though to a certain extent, the UCC had overtaken them in terms of inclusive language and theology. What the MCC did offer, was a more bespoke style of worship, due to its size:

There are 68 affirming churches in the Dallas-Forth Worth metroplex. You have some choices. Now the degree of affirmation differs, the theology differs, the style of worship differs... some people like a smaller church, more intimate, more flexible, that’s us.

It was notable, however, that despite a large number of affirming churches in the area, Rev. Darraugh commented that ‘locally I’ve not seen much’ in terms of specialised teaching or

literature on bisexual issues, though ‘I have seen bisexuality addressed as a standalone affinity group at a MCC general conference, the international convention.’

In terms of her own congregation, Rev. Darraugh has preached against binary thinking as a means of making bisexual and transgender members feel welcome at MCC Dallas:

It’s a piece that we continue to teach in our congregations – for people not to assume that they either know the gender preferred pronouns that somebody might want to have, or that they presume that someone is gay and not straight, or that they presume that they know someone’s orientation. Because their thinking’s so binary... I do think there are enough subtleties in what we have preached about or talked about, that people have felt comfortable in talking to me about being bisexual.

Rev. Darraugh also distinguished between ‘affirming’ and ‘inclusive.’

There’s a difference between affirming [and inclusive]. Because you can affirm that which is. Inclusive is affirming that which is and that which might be. And I think MCC is inclusive. And that means the door is wide open and something else, some other thing we’ve not thought of and some other new [thing] could come, and that might be around us understanding orientation and gender expression and all that.

This felt a significant distinction, offering space to spiritually expand and encompass the ever-diverse range of sexual identities and gender expressions, where other denominations may only accommodate for now.

Reverend James Campbell (UCC) in New York, felt that the welcome to LGBT people needed to be made more explicit: ‘To say you’re open and affirming is coded language, not everyone understands that. We try to say it in a number of different ways. We say it’s everybody’s church.’

Similar to MCC Dallas, while bisexual people were present in the congregation and appeared to feel comfortable there, there was no bespoke welcome of bisexual people:

During the welcome at church on Sunday, we say the same line every week: ‘No matter who you are, no matter where you are on life’s journey, you’re welcome here.’ When we have communion, we make a big deal: ‘There’s nobody in this room, on the sidewalk, in the whole world, who is not welcome’... The one bisexual member who has been very open about his bisexuality has indicated to me that he feels very welcome here and not judged, but I think he’s picking up on the general kind of welcome we do for everybody, as opposed to a very specific statement: we’re affirming of bisexual people.

Nevertheless, the fact that bisexual people remain in the congregation is indicative that these environments are welcoming enough, if not intentionally and proactively welcoming of

bisexual people. At the Cathedral of Hope, I was informed by Reverend Cazares-Thomas that nobody is asked about their sexual orientation, so there was no clear idea of how many congregants actually identified as bisexual. However, Associate Pastor Todd Scoggins told me that anyone who stated they were bisexual would be 'just loved' by the congregation.

Episcopalian pastor Reverend Connor Gwyn conceded that his own denomination was patchy in its affirmation of LGBT people, but appreciated the notion within the Episcopal Church that 'God is still speaking and the Holy Spirit is revealing more and more of God's truth.' Despite appreciating the combination of tradition and inclusive thinking within his own denomination, Rev. Gwyn still rated the MCC as the most affirming of LGBT people, and acknowledged some failings on the part of his own church to address bisexuality:

I'm lucky enough to have a MCC church nearby, and that's probably your 'go to,' just because the whole denomination was established basically for LGBT folks... The Unitarian is also... fairly open and accepting, and more and more Episcopal churches. The majority of Episcopal churches that you're visiting will be fairly affirming. There's some issue with bisexuality. I'm not sure how much of a denominational thing that is, or just a basic misunderstanding of bisexuality or lack of knowledge about it.

Whilst a large number of participants in this research cell were priests affiliated to denominations, others were not. I felt it important to clarify which church traditions they believed to most affirming of bisexual Christians.

Beth Firestein stated that she recommended the Unitarian Church to clients, which she saw as 'probably one of the most welcoming' and 'principally Christian in a broad sense but allowing for many concepts of God.' Robyn Ochs also cited the Unitarians as being the most affirming of bisexual Christians, alluding to their 'wonderful sex ed' programme ('Our Whole Lives' or OWL).

Marie Alford-Harkey, now an ordained MCC Pastor but interviewed in her capacity as President of the Religious Institute and author of *Bisexuality: Making the Invisible Visible in Faith Communities* (2014) cited the MCC as the most welcoming, in terms of purely Christian denominations, followed by the UCC, Episcopalian and Lutheran: 'None of them are perfect, but if I had to rank them, that's how I would go. I would definitely tell them [a friend] to go with MCC, UCC.' For Marie, the Episcopalian, Lutheran and United Church of Christ all varied from region to region; MCC was the only denomination that was uniformly accepting of LGBT people.

James Rowe of Believe Out Loud! stated: 'The UCC Church is very welcoming and affirming; you can pretty much have any conversation there and be welcomed.' He also noted that his Catholic small group was open to discussions on sexuality, despite the official church teaching around the subject.

To summarise, the Metropolitan Community Church and the United Church of Christ were cited as the most affirming Christian denominations, alongside the Unitarian Universalist Church (generalised spirituality).

## **9.7 Obstacles to Bisexual Affirmation**

The previous section considered how churches and organisations affirmed bisexual people. This section looks at some of the obstacles faced by bisexual Christians.

James Rowe, President of Believe Out Loud!, felt that widespread ignorance and horizontal oppression from within the LGBT community were the main stressors for bisexual people of faith:

I think a lack of respect for those who identify as bisexual and a lack of even acknowledgement it exists, that people actually identify as bisexual. There's a lack of respect... both within the LGBT community and outside the LGBT community.

In terms of church resources, James Rowe added: 'I've seen other themes, topics, but not bisexual and Christian identity kind of subject matters as a standalone.'

Whilst the Bisexual Resource Center is a secular organisation, two of the trustees mentioned have experience of church life. Treasurer Julia Kenfield is a Catholic, while Michael Monroe comes from an evangelical background. Julia Kenfield spoke of the stigmatisation of bisexual people she had encountered in the church:

From my own experiences of being Christian and just sort of going to church or being like in a spiritual community – and I might just be talking for myself – there's this idea of bisexuality, that bisexuals are promiscuous or sleep with everyone and I think too, especially with the Christianity in the Bible, any kind of sexuality is sort of like strongly discouraged, in terms of outside of marriage.

Michael Monroe spoke of the general discomfort with non-binary modes of existence:



I think there's this tremendous pressure, sort of an addiction to the binary... it all seems to make sense, homonormative culture... but these bisexuals, trans or otherwise, who identify as bi, it's just this ultimate pariah, it's just this damn creature that can't make up its mind.

However, Monroe also felt there was a perception that the word bisexual itself suggested gender binary, in terms of male and female objects of attraction, with pansexual being the current terminology of choice for those with feelings towards more than one gender.

There was a real sense in which religious organisations did not access the BRC for resources; the trustees could only name a handful of occasions in their tenure where they had had contact with church bodies or theological institutions. Robyn Ochs felt that 'very profound anti-sex beliefs' and 'sex negativity' were among the reasons for the lack of acknowledgement of bisexual people in the church, alongside ignorance, heterosexism, homo- and biphobia. She felt it was possibly worse for bisexual men, as sexual relations between women were not seen to constitute 'real sex' owing to the lack of penile penetration. Rev. Layton Williams (PCUSA) also sensed sex-negativity around bi erasure in churches: 'I think in the most direct literal reality, it's the word... at a really baseline level, I think there's a sort of an over hypersexualised stigma round bisexuality. Makes it feel more taboo, I think, to talk about.' Rev Colleen Darraugh (MCC) also felt the word bisexual was problematic within erotophobic environments: 'It brings up sex, it sounds like it's all about sex and it's not about love.'

Marie Alford-Harkey also spoke of the lack of conversation and realism around sexual issues in the church, preventing young people from navigating their sexual identities:

... most men in my congregations were still pretending that they don't have sex until they're married, which I think is hysterically funny. We do a disservice, because we don't help older teens and young adults establish, what is your sexual ethic? Because all we say, is don't do it until you're married, and clearly nobody's following that rule. We're not helping, we're just leaving it out there. Either you've having sex or you're not having sex, but you don't have any grounding, because you feel like you've already transgressed.

For activist Eliel Cruz, the lack of bisexual role models was a factor in ignorance of bisexual issues, which impacted on church attitudes to bisexuality, too:

In the LGBT community... it's not too much better, but at least there's some Out and Proud bisexual celebrities. There are very few of them, but there's a little bit more of

an awareness. In Christian faith traditions, the conversation has primarily been over gay individuals, really gay men. There is no understanding of bisexuality in Christian faith traditions... I'm like discussing organisational work with local faith communities. There's little to no understanding, I actually found.

The ignorance of bisexuality has even led Cruz to stop mentioning his own bisexual identity in media pieces, as it prevented his work from being taken seriously:

I've been writing in media for about four years... I will identify as bisexual often in my piece. And I would recognise that because I identified in that way, it would derail the piece for people. Like in the comments section, instead of writing why we need to make a campus safer for LGBT students, they would latch on the fact that I call myself bisexual and it would be like, what does that mean? So I don't just write pieces about my sexuality because there's so little understanding of that in my community. And I wanted people to get what I wanted to say without being derailed by my sexuality, if that makes sense.

Rev. Layton Williams (PCUSA) felt that the silence on bisexuality in churches was a combination of (unintentional) bisexual erasure, ignorance and stigmatisation of the orientation, even within affirming congregations such as her own:

You can't assume that being inclusive, openly inclusive, in your language and your sermon illustrations of gay and lesbian couples... makes you inclusive of a bisexual person, right? If you are intentional and telling a story about a family in your sermon that is two women, right, there's no real clear way to make it explicit that you're also being inclusive of bisexuality, unless you say that one of them is bisexual, right? So I think in some ways, people are less clear on even how to be explicitly welcoming. And I think a lot of people still don't believe it's real... It's a phase, they think it's inherently promiscuous. So all of those make it taboo, in a way that I think being gay just isn't to the same degree... The denomination has done very little work... I think they've done nothing explicitly around ministering to people who are bisexual.

Even at MCC Dallas, bisexuality was not specifically addressed, by admission of its own Lead Pastor, Rev Colleen Darraugh:

I think largely it's unaddressed in the congregation. I may say GLBT. There's not a lot of stuff that's really specifically bi focused... one on ones is where it really comes, when we talk about bisexuality and pastoral care.

Bivisibility was also impacted, in Darraugh's view, by the human tendency to judge a person's sexuality by their current partner, a tendency picked up on by other participants in this cell:

The reality of bisexuals socially is that bisexuals disappear... because you are judged by and defined by the person you are with at the moment. So if you're with a person of the opposite sex, you are perceived as and socially labelled heterosexual. And if you are with a person of the same-sex, people view you, see you and label you as gay/lesbian. So bisexual is not a visible identity, so bisexuals disappear.

Psychotherapist Michael Salas spoke of the damaging effect of family-centred fundamentalist church teachings on LGBT Mormons he saw:

There are a lot of people who are struggling with reconciling – because I have a lot of Mormon clients - the church's stance: it's not something that you can change, but it's something you should control. Your orientation is something you should control. Your main goal in life is your folks, your marriage. So all that comes before authenticity. So a lot of them are really struggling, do I accept an authentic life, or do I accept this? So a lot of the time there's a lot of secret behaviour, a lot of secret stuff behind the scenes. So there's a lot of shaming stuff there – we work with that as well. And there's a lot of cheating going on as well, because they're really compartmentalising who they are. I'm not telling them how to live their lives. Some people do that, but I don't actually think that's affirming; I think it's shaming.

Pastor Ron Woolsey was, however, one of those who was directive in attitude towards bisexual Christians and believed sexual orientation to be controllable:

Bisexuality is a sin issue, a violation of the 7<sup>th</sup> commandment, just as adultery, homosexuality, masturbation, paedophilia etc. As such, it needs to be acknowledged and renounced... We are not to cling to our sins, but rather are to seek victory over them. Church attendance should be welcomed for all who are seeking truth. Membership, however, is sacred and should be reserved for those who demonstrate the power of God in their lives to follow Christ in the path of discipleship, a path of transformation of character.

For Woolsey, the term LGBT Christian was an 'oxymoron:' 'In accepting Christ, one should not attempt to be a Prefix Christian, but should simply be a Christian without adding all the conditions implied in the prefix.

Professor Lisa Diamond of the University of Utah, also works closely with the Mormon community and confirmed the damage done to young people through the attempt to control sexuality:

I think that bisexuals face specific challenges in a number of domains, but I think that this notion 'Oh well, then you should be able to conform to all the strictures of your

faith' is a very unique and very damaging type of social pressure and we haven't been dealing seriously with it.

A central issue for Mormon bisexual youth, as indicated by Michael Salas, is the pressure to marry. Within this heteronormative, family-centred culture, there is no room for sexual or gender fluidity.

Diamond notes:

Though there are members of that faith that have tried to become more accepting of same sex sexuality, it's in a very restrictive sort of framework that doesn't make any space for bisexuality or sexual fluidity. The sort of line they take is, my child is born that way... that creates problems for a bisexual.'

As with the Church of England's recommendation in *Issues in Human Sexuality* (1991), that bisexual people conform to their heterophile leanings and take a partner of the opposite sex, bisexual Mormons are pressurised to follow their 'straight' side. Diamond continues:

A lot of people in the faith are like, 'If you have the capacity to have a partner of either gender, then you're morally obliged to make a relationship with the opposite sex.' So I feel like a lot of these half-ways to acceptance that have built in religious communities just view bisexuality as a sort of different category. Like if you're bisexual, then you should do what we think God wants you to do. We're willing to give you a pass if you're exclusively gay, but if you're bisexual then you really should get heterosexually married. And I think that puts a lot of faithful bisexuals in a really problematic position.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church, Eliel Cruz's denomination, appeared to be even more regressive on human sexuality than the Latter-day Saints. When I asked him how affirming the SDA Church was, Cruz replied: 'Oh not at all! They're like 20 years behind even evangelical Christianity. They're still peddling reparative therapy in a lot of ways. They're not affirming whatsoever.'

Rev James Campbell (UCC) conceded that his church reflected the general disconnect the public at large had towards bisexuality, which translated into silence on the whole subject:

The B is... included, but it's never sort of expanded upon. It's part of the great variety of sexual orientations, but in this congregation... it's sort of like an afterthought... I'm not sure we actually do that much for bisexual people. I think probably, without judging my congregation too harshly, the way we express the welcome is as passive as most of society.

Rev Campbell further admitted that they had no bi-specific literature within his UCC church:

There's one brochure that's put out by the denomination – we have several things we use - it's called The Bible and Homosexuality and I'm sure there's reference to bisexuality in there, but it's thrown in there, you know, [in] the alphabet soup. There's nothing specific about bisexuality... I was thinking about this this morning, I sort of felt embarrassed... I'm really struck by the fact of how little I know about this and how little we say this or make efforts, that bisexual people know they are welcome. We say it, but it's always in the middle of everything else. There's never any emphasis on it. We had a workshop here a few years ago on transgender... never would think to do that on bisexuality, which is interesting... it's not an active or a conscious silence, but that's what we do... how many people in my congregation haven't told me that they're bisexual, because they don't feel like they can?

During the interview, Rev Campbell expressed 'conviction' at the absence of intentional focus on bisexuality at his church:

People who wander in here, many of them have been greatly damaged by religion... We sometimes call ourselves the Church of Last Resort. So if the Church of Last Resort only has a few words for bisexual people, then there's no-one else after that to say anything. So I feel very convicted to think more about this. I had to think about this a little before we met, and my conclusion was that what we do is lacking, it's really lacking. We give more attention to every other group than this one – and why?

One reason Rev Campbell himself came up with was the link – justified or not – between bisexuality and polyamory, something that will be explored under 10.11: 'Maybe bisexuality is pushing that [polyamory] right into the discussion, and maybe that's what makes us all so gun shy about it. Can't go near that.'

Rev Neil Cazares-Thomas (also UCC) believed that sexual identity politics and its by-product, horizontal oppression, played a key role as well. Bisexuals, he stated, are an 'Achilles heel' for lesbian and gay people, 'who fought to make a choice in their gender identity or sexual orientation or gender expression.' Bisexual people 'queer the notion of what it means to be lesbian or gay, and then they become seen as a traitor, they're seen as walking a fine line.'

Rev Cazares-Thomas feared that the increasing acceptance of gay and lesbian people in US society would lead to the further oppression of bisexual and transgender people, either in society at large or by the LGBT community: 'I just fear that as we become more and more accepted and nurtured, we become the oppressor.'

I also interviewed Associate Pastor Todd Scoggins at the Cathedral of Hope (UCC) on bivisibility. Rev Scoggins conceded: ‘... there’s a huge lack of awareness, I think, for the ‘B’... we haven’t heard their story so much in the midst of our community.’ I also asked what bisexual literature was available in the church building, the largest of its kind in the world in terms of LGBT congregation:

I don’t know anything specific, unless there might be stuff in our bookstore... I would dare to say we probably do, but there’s obviously not enough attention to it, because I don’t know of a specific resource... we have a great article that Michael Piazza our [former] pastor wrote, maybe in the 80s, it’s called *Homosexuality and Christianity*.

There were just two books in the bookstore at the time of my visit (May 2016) – Sheri Eisner’s *Notes for a Bisexual Revolution* and *Bi Voices Around the World* (ed. Robyn Ochs). I also visited the Youth Breakout room, in which there was a rainbow flag, a straight flag, a trans flag and a furred up pansexual flag, but no bisexual flag. I questioned one of the Youth Workers and she did not know that a bisexual flag existed.

However, that was two more books than can be located in the Episcopal Church - Rev Connor Gwyn stated that he had never seen any bisexual literature in a church building and that the extent to which bisexuality was acknowledged was ‘saying B in LGBT.’ Rev Janet Edwards (PCUSA: More Light) acknowledged that bisexuality was only talked about at her church ‘when I bring it up.’ James Rowe of Believe Out Loud!, a practising Catholic, noted:

I have never heard the Catholic church from the pulpit even talk about LGBT issues. I’ve probably attended between six and ten [Catholic clergy] events. We’ve talked about trans, we’ve talked about lesbians, we’ve talked about gays, but... never have bisexual conversations come out.

Such a lack of acknowledgement caused Professor Lisa Diamond to comment:

In my own research, it’s just become so clear to me how underrepresented that population is... it really is amazing that it’s 2016 and we’re not that much further along with visibility about these issues than we were 15 years ago... it’s something that our culture has a lot of difficulty reckoning with.

## 9.8 Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted the lack of awareness of bisexuality in the US church as a whole, demonstrated in the almost complete absence of bespoke bisexual resources.

Chapter 10 continues to look at the experiences of bi-affirming pastors and educators in the USA, and the reader is referred to the concluding thoughts at the end of Chapter 10, which sum up the findings from Research Cell 3.





## CHAPTER 10

### Bi-affirming Pastors and Educators in the US: Pastoral Issues

This chapter continues from Chapter 9, with special focus on bisexual mental health and relationship configurations. I also consider how pastors and educators see the future in terms of bisexual affirmation in the Church.

#### 10.1 Bisexual Mental Health

While biphobic behaviours such as horizontal oppression were mentioned by a number of respondents, this appeared to relate to the LGBT community in general, and not specifically to churches, where bisexual people tended to be unintentionally overlooked rather than antagonised. Nevertheless, this lack of acknowledgement of bisexuality as an orientation did appear to have a detrimental effect on the mental health of bisexual Christians – and this was not restricted to conservative denominations. As Michael Monroe (BRC) commented:

In casual conversation, even with the sort of well-meaning progressive Christians, if I went on a date last night, it must have been with a girl or with a woman... I think if I said that, they would be properly mortified. But it's there. It's just that momentum, they themselves are swept up by it, and of course, as a bisexual person, you're more of a seismograph. Just like the slightest tremor of that non-acceptance, it's going to read and you feel it. And so those spaces for us are probably amplified in terms of being uncomfortable... despite all the intellectual assertions of inclusivity that they would say sincerely.

Michael Monroe also spoke of the 'revolving closet door' faced by bisexual people, whose identities may straddle several intersections, including faith. There was a need to come out multiple times to different peer groups because of the lack of visible clues that a person was bisexual. That in itself was exhausting, and more exaggerated within church communities, where heteronormativity is welcomed and bisexuality appears to be even more studiously ignored. This can have extremely negative effects on bisexual mental health. As Robyn Ochs noted:

When you identify as bi, you need support and sustenance just as much as any other sexual minority person, but when you go into a co-called LGBTQ space... and you don't find that, you don't feel safe, then it can really add to your sense of helplessness, of not having a place to go where you'll be understood and embraced and accepted.

The notion of a lack of 'safe space' was mentioned by several participants as a key factor in poor bisexual mental health.

The issue of legitimacy was another one raised by both Alison Amyx (BOL) and Robyn Ochs as a source of additional anxiety. Bisexuals in long-term relationships in particular may struggle with the idea of their bisexuality being legitimate in terms of a sexual orientation, as do those with a strong preference for one gender. This identity-anxiety may be particularly relevant within church environments, where marriage and family life is emphasised. Eliel Cruz and Lisa Diamond, who both work with ultra conservative fundamentalist denominations (SDA and LDS respectively), pointed to the dangers of bullying youth into marrying opposite-sex partners at a crucial stage in their sexual development.

From the opposite perspective, Beth Firestein commented on the difficulties faced by bisexual women coming out of heterosexual marriages and family structures to pursue relationships with the same-sex (by her own admission, she had not counselled many bisexual men). A Christian identity placed an extra pressure on those individuals leaving a marriage, as it did those contemplating marriage (or indeed having marriage contemplated on their behalf). The pressure was particularly felt by women in their 30s and 40s:

In several of the cases, the presenting concern of their religion seems to be correlated with coming out a little later in life, in their 30s and 40s, most often in that general age range and most frequently as they are leaving a heterosexual marriage. And they have a formative sexual identity with sort of an unquestioned sense of belonging, whether or not they felt close to or alienated from a Christianity in their background... For those women for whom their Christian identity is also, or has been very central, they're immediately suffering from an identity crisis around that.

Shame was potentially another factor for elevated rates of depression in bisexual people, according to psychotherapist, Michael Salas. This was an issue exacerbated by the unique pressures brought on individuals by religious communities:

I think it comes down to shame and not feeling like you can authentically be who you are as a whole person... I think that could be very isolating, knowing you're not going to

be fully accepted by either community. There's just a lot of judgement that people face.

This sense of shame and guilt, in the view of Rev Colleen Darraugh (MCC) was a key stressor: '... guilt on mental health is quite a weight. And guilt has largely come from the spiritual community.'

Even within affirming communities, however, it could be hard for bisexual people to fit in, as the growing acceptance of same-sex marriage has increased notions of coupledness and 'settling down' – what Rev Todd Scoggins refers to as 'June and Ward Cleaver Syndrome.' Rev James Campbell (UCC) notes:

Part of it, too, is this societal pressure to couple, right? And a bisexual person may couple with someone of their own sex, someone of the opposite sex, and that may change over the course of that person's lifetime. And so that's messing with sort of the church's idea – and even though we don't say this in our church, we still have the expectation, 'when are you going to find someone and settle down?'... I'm not talking about promiscuity, I don't mean that at all – it's the ability [of bisexual people] to fit into different molds and not be settled forever in this one way, and it messes with expectations.

Rev Campbell acknowledged that the two people in his congregation who were openly bisexual had both suffered from serious depression.

Professor Lisa Diamond also felt that the increased tolerance of homosexual partnerships had further impacted upon the psychological wellbeing of bisexual people:

In general, a lot of studies have found that bisexual individuals actually have far higher rates of anxiety and depression than exclusively gay individuals and the prevailing thinking is that it's because their needs are adequately addressed by a discourse that is like, 'Oh, you poor gay people, we'll let you have your same sex relationships because you can't possibly do anything else.' Bisexual individuals are not sort of served by that discourse, yet they're not getting any more acceptance from the heterosexual side. So they end up getting a sort of double dose of marginalisation.

For Ron Woolsey, though, pursuing a lifestyle that is contrary to God's will is at the heart of poor mental health among LGBT Christians:

There is a conflict of interests dwelling in the same heart. The conflict involves self first, rather than God first. The LGBT life is not in harmony with the expressed will of God...

The formula for health, happiness, and a sound mind is found in following God's plan.

Woolsey elaborates:

The elevated rate of suicide with the LGBT community and bisexuals in particular, as you state, I would contribute [sic] to the disappointment, frustration, despair, perception of rejection and depression that would accompany such a life practice... no path outside that laid out by our Creator will lead to true peace, joy, happiness, and fulfilment in life.

However, it is this lack of embodied theology – where a disconnect between mind and body is encouraged – that has led to poor mental health among bisexual people, in the view of Rev Neil Cazares-Thomas (UCC):

You can talk about the mind and you can talk about theology, as long as you keep it up here. But as soon as you try to embody it... then it's classified as sin. Nobody really wants to talk about what this really means, to embody theology in a full holistic manner. And yet we're very happy to talk about God as Trinity, as three in one, one in three, mind, body and spirit. But we're not willing to talk about it when it comes to our human expression. So again, it's this separation that I think adds to... not being able to internalise our spirituality in good and healthy ways.

Against this backdrop of repression and oppression for bisexual people of faith, the words of Robyn Ochs stood in sharp contrast. For Ochs, the (secular) bisexual community was a source of freedom and had a positive impact on her mental health:

I love being part of a community that challenges binaries, that challenges over-simplistic framings, that is willing to think outside the box. One of the things I have appreciated about the bi communities I have been part of over the course of my life is the openness. I have found a degree of openness that I have not found in other places. I've found less judgmental-ism... it's kind of a micro-version of the world I'd like to live in, where differences are not seen as deal-breakers or barriers, but as interesting variations, and I love that... I am so happy to be who I am. Being bisexual has given me a lifetime of specific experiences that make me me; I wouldn't trade it for anything. I have no regrets. I wish I had been in a less hostile external environment, but I feel so fortunate. I wouldn't want to be anyone else but me.

This quote confounds the notion that all bisexual people are inherently sick or damaged, but it is notable that it comes from someone from outside of the church.

## **10.2 Attitudes to Non-Monogamy**

I also questioned participants in Research Cell 3 on attitudes to non-monogamy/polyamory. This was covered by the question: what do you see as an ethical relationship for a bisexual person of faith? I also asked a follow-up question on occasion, namely, what's your view on a bisexual who takes a primary partner of one gender and a secondary partner of another? For those who were in long-term monogamous relationships, I also asked: do you feel suffocated as a bisexual in an opposite-sex *vis-à-vis* same-sex relationship?

This was a problematic area. On one hand, as Robyn Ochs was to point out, non-monogamy was no more of an issue for bisexual people than any other sexual orientation, so to focus on polyamory in this way was almost colluding with the stereotype of the promiscuous bisexual. This was unhelpful in the battle to establish affirmation for bisexual people in the church. Yet on the other hand, as Marie Alford-Harkey noted, it could not be denied that polyamory was often associated with bisexuality and to avoid the subject was to risk appearing both defensive and disapproving of other people's considered life choices.

From my own interviews, it was clear that a number of bisexual Christians did practise polyamory [ $n=8$ ], though admittedly they had found it difficult to remain in the church. On that basis, I felt it relevant to broach the subject of non-monogamy among bisexual believers.

As far as support organisations and activists were concerned, Alison Amyx of Believe Out Loud! stated: 'We do not currently take a position on polyamory' but indicated that they may do so in the future. President James Rowe hinted that this was more likely than not, commenting: 'I think both personally and professionally, I support wholeness and the feeling of wholeness. I think it's important that people should feel supported in their efforts to feel whole.'

Bi activist Robyn Ochs, whilst monogamous herself ('because that's what's best for me'), felt polyamory was acceptable within an ethical framework of equality and mutuality, but that this was a standard applicable to all relationship configurations and orientations:

I would not draw a distinction for bisexual people; I think for any person, an ethical relationship model is where all parties involved agreed to the arrangement... whatever it is, whether it's monogamy, polyamory, whatever. Communication and agreement. That would be the same for anyone... When you're not in a relationship like that, then it's problematic... I do know people, of all sexual orientations, who have been in relationships where they had not really bought into the situation, but they put up with it. They tolerated it. That's not really [agreement].

It did irk her, however, that bisexuality was so often linked with polyamory:

It frustrates me that the question of non-monogamy or polyamory almost always only comes up in the context of bisexuality. Because I don't think it's our topic. I think that it's a topic. Bisexual people are a subset of people who are polyamorous... Lots of straight people are poly... it feels like that is a separate conversation... I don't think it's necessarily good for polyamory or for bisexuality... because it's confusing those topics.

One of the reasons bisexuality perhaps distance itself from polyamory relates to the potential acceptability of bisexuality within a church context. As Ochs noted: 'I think there are many more religious denominations in the US that would accept bisexual identity, probably fewer that would accept polyamory.'

This was borne out in several interviews. For example, when I questioned Marie Alford-Harkey on the omission of polyamory from *Bisexuality: Making the Invisible Visible in Faith Communities* (2014), she replied:

If I wanted this resource to be read and heard by Mr Midwestern Pastor who has no idea what bisexuality really even means, then if I start talking about polyamory, he's already chucked it in the garbage before he's gotten past Page 1. So what we did really carefully, and hopefully that came through, was not to condemn polyamory in any way, but also not to really address it.

Alford-Harkey conceded, however, that the 'P' question was nearly always raised in connection with bisexuality, whatever attempts were made to steer clear of it: 'The first thing that people want to come up and talk to me about, afterwards or even during the talk, is about polyamory.'

Whilst not addressing polyamory itself in *Bisexuality: Making the Invisible Visible in Faith Communities* (2014) - beyond a brief mention in the Myths and Facts section - Alford-Harkey stated that the Religious Institute was not against consensual mutual polyamorous relationships, where there is 'justice and love and right relationship,' citing Marvin Ellison and Carter Heyward – both previously mentioned in this research - as key influencers.

Rev Janet Edwards (PCUSA), a key contributor to Alford-Harkey & Haffner's book, commented: 'The bisexuality guide of the Religious Institute had to be written at a certain moment in time. And it was a moment in time where we are still very prudish around the concept of polyamory in the church here.'

Edwards agreed with Robyn Ochs, that it was politically prudent to steer clear of polyamory to increase affirmation of bisexual people:

In the church circles that I know of... who do have a hard time integrating bisexual people... polyamory is the 3<sup>rd</sup> rail. You just don't want to touch it. And the reason is, it's the one thing the Conservatives want to throw back at us – with us being the whole LGBTQ movement - that we're promiscuous.

For Janet Edwards, polyamory was not a practice she personally felt comfortable with, however another PCUSA priest, Rev Layton Williams, whilst not practising polyamory either, had no issue from a pastoral perspective:

Speaking in a general sense, I really believe that the key factor that I see uplifted in Scripture that informs how I believe human relating in general and romantic relating should work, is about mutual respect and consent. A healthy relationship is one where everyone is growing while offering each other support... As a pastor, I don't see that as inherently immoral. Just like in a relationship between two people, there are some really unhealthy and immoral ways to go about that relationship.

That was very much the view of psychotherapist, Beth Firestein, as well, who commented:

I think there's more integrity, and I would even say religious acceptability, in honest non-monogamy than in a cheating monogamy... I like to help people distinguish whether it's a traditional lifestyle that's being handled in a dysfunctional way, or it's an alternative lifestyle that's being handled in a dysfunctional way.

Rev Colleen Darraugh (MCC) stated that congregations weren't necessarily as pro polyamory as their progressive pastors, however, often owing to the struggle to achieve same-sex marriage. Polyamory threatened the new-found respectability of lesbian and gay believers, and moreover, 'not even all the pastors are at the same place.'

For Rev Darraugh, monogamy was not even a Biblical value:

We've made monogamy a value and it's not a biblical value – and that makes people crazy if I say that... It's very clear in the Old Testament that people had multiple wives, you know. Monogamy is a western thing, you know, western culture... we're judging it against this artificial standard that we think is a biblical value. The bible doesn't say, 'we shall love one person.' The truth is, the bible tells us to love everybody! It doesn't tell us to be only be sexual with one!

For Beth Firestein, rigid insistence on monogamy was potentially a narrow view of God:

What I would possibly ask my client in this situation is, what is it in your understanding that would argue against the okay-ness of loving more than one individual? What is it in your understanding of God that leads you to feel that is not ok?

Pastor Ron Woolsey's interpretation of Scripture, meanwhile, led him to believe that polyamory definitely was not 'okay':

There should be one and only one sexual partner, and that partner should be within a marriage union. God can bless that. But He cannot bless any union that is a perversion of what He created in the beginning – the sacred marriage institution of one man with one woman.

Bisexual activist, Eliel Cruz, himself from an overtly conservative tradition (SDA), also saw no biblical case for non-monogamy, despite his affirming credentials:

I'm a believer in monogamy, absolutely. Since I am not myself polyamorous or non-monogamous, I've been waiting to like hear some kind of like biblical justification from other Christians who are poly and stuff, but I haven't seen that yet. So I don't want to say I'm not open to that, I just don't see that.

Rev Neil Cazares-Thomas (UCC), however, did see biblical justification for non-monogamy:

If we look at our Scriptures, there are no monogamous relationships in the Bible. There isn't. Even in the line of Jesus, David lists all of his concubines... every relationship that you see in the Bible is polyamorous, certainly not monogamous. And so when the Christian Church holds up this ideal of one man and one woman, one has to challenge where that notion comes from... the truth is, nobody in Biblical times got married for life. They got married for property, for protection, for dynasty.

Rev Cazares-Thomas shared the views of several of his peers, that it was the behaviour of people in relationships that counted, not the relationship configuration itself: 'I think that people should establish relationships with honesty, with integrity, with covenant. I think that lying to your partner, being irresponsible in a relationship, are wrong, whether you're heterosexual or homosexual or bisexual.'

This was echoed by Robyn Ochs: 'I don't think cheating in any respect ever, whether it's in your Math exam or on your partner, is okay.'



Neither did Rev Cazares-Thomas believe it was the Church's business to intervene in personal covenants made between individuals:

We have some morals or ethics, some kind of boundaries around these relationships, but I don't think it's the Church's business how people figure out their personal relationships... if the covenant is firm, and everyone knows what's involved in that covenant, it's all good.

He echoed Beth Firestein's view, that to live honestly in covenant with multiple partners both had more integrity, and offered better health prospects, than suppression or deceit:

I think that when you oppress or suppress any part of who you are, it's going to come out. So to deny that part of you... I think causes some internal angst. I think it's far more honest to live it openly and honestly and productively and creatively and beautifully. That takes extraordinary people to do that. That's what they would hear preached here. Monogamy's not the only way. We have people here who are in triads. They are just as accepted and embraced here. They may not be understood, but that's not the issue. The issue's not whether we understand; the issue is we learn to live through our differences, embrace those and see them as blessings and not as causes for dysfunction or for disengagement, but we face them as part of the beauty of this incredible creation that God put us into and find our way through it.

This embracing of difference was clearly practised at the Cathedral of Hope, with Associate Pastor, Rev Todd Scoggins, revealing that he blessed polyamorous relationships in creative ways within the church: 'It's your day. So if you want a blessing of rings that goes to each person of the relationship, amen. If you want to do a unity candle like traditional couples and maybe use three candles instead of two...'

As the UCC was not a creedal church, where pastors are required to agree theologically, Rev Scoggins had the freedom to bless such relationships. For Rev Scoggins, this was entirely in keeping with the radical gospel of Jesus Christ, who fought oppression in society:

It's different, and there's realms of the Christian Church where that would get you in a lot of hot water. But that's what Jesus did the whole time. Jesus was always confronting the religious orders of society, not to be rebellious, but to challenge the thinking. Are we doing this because a law was set at some point, or are we doing this because love calls us to see beyond our own experience?

There's healthy and beautiful things about monogamous relationships. Ye, do it, great, if that's how you're wired... but don't make the assumption or broad paintbrush – not

everyone has to be like that. That's oppressive, if you've been feeling the pressure or the society or the systemic issues forcing you to be something you're not.

For Beth Firestein, monogamy was not simply about sex: 'I think monogamy is about the choice of whether to direct your energy, your time, your romantic attraction to your partner or not.' By that definition, many more people are polyamorous than would perhaps care to admit, of all sexual orientations.

### **10.3 The Future**

All participants were asked how they envisaged the future for bisexual Christians in the US. What might be done to improve both visibility and affirmation of bisexual people in the church?

An issue that was raised by a number of participants, was the absence of discussion on sex and sexuality in general within church communities, rendering more nuanced debate unlikely. James Rowe (BOL) commented on a marriage equality court case he had attended in a Presbyterian Church, where a lawyer had pointed to the lack of debate on even heterosexual sex within the Presbyterian community. Michael Monroe (BRC) expressed similar sentiments about the Episcopal Church:

My sister and brother in law happen to be very liberal, progressive minded Episcopalians... they're all about having like a rainbow flag on their church marquees or whatever and all that stuff. But I still find in these congregations, there's still this aspect that sexuality and sexual orientation are not, you know, a table topic in general.

Rev Janet Edwards (PCUSA) confirmed the sex-negativity within American culture:

Just to loosen up in our discussion on sexuality in general would be a start. Because we can't get to bisexual until we've settled more comfortably into sexuality in general... then we can get into the beautiful varieties that are true for people.

For Rev Colleen Darraugh (MCC), the focus on transgender rights was actually helpful from a strategic perspective, rather than a diversion from bisexual visibility. This was because it was causing the public to query their notions of male and female and gender/sexual fluidity:

With the stuff in the US about the bathroom bans and all that nonsense, we're re-entering the conversation about what it means to be male, what it means to be

female. And I think that's pertinent... if we're having the fluid conversations, and if we can talk about gender fluidity, then I think that's going to have a marked impact on a conversation about bisexuality.

However, such progressions had to be handled strategically, or 'you lose your job and you don't move the people that need to be moved.' Rev Darraugh's strategy involved challenging people's assumptions around fixed categories, suggesting a world of infinite possibilities and variations, rather than closed binary systems: 'In our diversity work, it's time for us to start tearing the labels off and seeing people... let people self-define, let people self-express.'

Rev Neil Cazares-Thomas (UCC) saw the hysteria surrounding the bathroom bills as indicative of systemic American erotophobia. At the heart of the bills was not transgender rights, but an avoidance of debate on sex and gender, or within conservative church cultures, a disembodied Pauline theology of sinful bodies waging war against pure thoughts. Entertaining a more embodied theology, however, was crucial though, for both our own self-knowledge and knowledge of the divine, in the view of Rev Cazares-Thomas:

If we could turn original sin into original blessing, I think that we would be able to have a far more holistic understanding of God, a more holistic understanding of our bodies, a much more holistic understanding of our sexual orientations. And that would add greatly to our depth of knowing God.

This would be particularly challenging within ultra-conservative Christian traditions. As Professor Lisa Diamond noted: 'If you belong to a religious tradition that doesn't intrinsically value sexual autonomy, you're already coming from behind... a lot of conservative religious traditions don't see sexual freedom and sexual expression as a value in and of itself.'

Emphasising individual's sexual truth was perhaps the key to progressing affirmation of bisexual people of faith, in Diamond's view: 'I think that's the strongest case to make for bisexuality... if that's someone's sexual truth, then that should be respected.'

Rev Darraugh was more hopeful about the future, believing that the millennial generation would bring their more tolerant attitudes to church with them, once they reached the 'settling down' stage of life:

People are now experimenting with their sexuality and questions of orientation. And I'm seeing more bisexuality expressed... and I think as those people come into church,

we're going to hear some new conversations, they're going to push those conversations.

This clearly points to a more ingrained church attending culture than in the UK, where it feels highly unlikely that congregations will see a sudden influx of sexually liberal Christians in their thirties, ready to recommit to church life, since it is unlikely they had ever attended in the first place (BRIN, 2017).

A need to make more safe spaces for bisexual people and bisexual Christians to form community was raised by a number of participants, with Rev Connor Gwyn (Episcopal Church) commenting:

... more and more churches are realising that people are looking for a space to be made, not necessarily looking for a programme – especially I think people my age are not looking to be told the answer or what the truth is, they're looking for a community to work out what the truth is. So I would love to see that kind of space made. Especially with bisexuality, people can come and share their experience, so it becomes less abstract and more human.

For Marie Alford-Harkey (RI), the key was emphasising the welfare of bisexual people rather than trying to win theological arguments:

... you have to lead with the pastoral, not the prophetic... what if it was a kid in your congregation, what if that was a kid you were pastoring, what if that was a kid that had been in your youth group for ten years? That's the foot in the door.

However, she was not hopeful of effecting change, citing the deeply ingrained binary culture in the United States referred to in the opening to this chapter:

I desperately want to be hopeful, but I have so much experience in mainline congregations and traditions and at least in this country, the squeamishness around sexuality and the very idea of sexual fluidity in any form is just so deeply ingrained, that... I just don't know. My dream, right, is to get people to this state of being able to recognise that moving beyond these binary categories really opens up not just how we think about ourselves as human beings and as sexual beings, but also how we think about divinity, and what does it mean to be created in the image of God?... But I feel like these are only conversations I'm having among my academic and my progressive activist friends...

Churches needed to be more intentional in their outreach to bisexual people, in Eliel Cruz's view: 'Just because your community is okay for gay and lesbian people, it isn't necessarily good

for bisexual or transgender individuals.’ James Rowe (BOL) felt that clergy in particular needed to do more to address bisexuality, but that would require pressure from the LGBT faith community:

We have to affirm our own... I think Christian clergy, leaders, also have a certain responsibility. But quite honestly, I think they only address these things when they’re being forced. And the only way to force that conversation is for our community to keep the pressure up and to continually ask for it to be talked about.

Rev Neil Cazares-Thomas concluded: ‘If we could begin to erode this binary notion, including our binary theology... we’d have a much better chance of helping ourselves and helping our community.’

#### **10.4 Conclusion**

Research Cell 3, spread over Chapters 9 and 10, looked at pastors and educators’ attitudes to, and experiences of, bisexuality in the USA. It was clear that similar issues of silence and ignorance surrounding bisexual issues were prevalent among clergy and laity, as in the UK. Coverage of bisexuality was patchy, even within affirming congregations, with precious little resources available beyond a couple of publications, to assist the nurture of bisexual Christians. Many pastors admitted to ignorance and even neglect of bisexual issues. This self-reflective practice, however, was refreshing.

A heavy cultural predisposition within American society towards binary thinking, coupled with a highly polarised religious culture, saw bisexuality largely erased from consciousness, both in church and wider society.



## CHAPTER 11

### Bisexual Christians in the US

This chapter contains findings from Research Cell 4, bisexual Christians in the US. As with Chapter 7: *Bisexual Christians in the UK*, this chapter considers to what extent bisexual people of faith feel included and upheld by their chosen denomination. Do these findings confirm or contradict the information shared by their pastors and educators? As with Research Cell 2: Bisexual Christians in the UK, findings from this cell are split over two chapters, with Chapter 11 covering general life experiences and Chapter 12 focusing on specific denominationally-led accounts of life as a bisexual Christian.

#### 11.1 Research Cell 4 (RC4) Participants

As interviewees were not, on the whole, public figures with an existing ministry or practice, they were given pseudonyms of their choice (or selected by myself, where no preference was expressed). A few participants were willing to use their own name, however I elected to give them a pseudonym to ensure uniformity and to protect them from any adverse consequences further down the line. Details of my methodological approach are outlined in **Chapter 5** and the list of prepared questions for participants in RC2 & 4 can be found in **Appendix 3**.

Participants were recruited from a range of sources over a nine month period, from February to November 2016. A large majority were sourced via Twitter, with several snowball effects occurring through this medium. I also contacted LGBT affirming church leaders, faith organisations and secular support groups for potential interviewees. As was the case in the UK, there was a great deal of enthusiasm for the project among the bisexual Christian community, and the number of participants greatly exceeded my initial target of ten. On the whole, participants were more talkative in the US than in the UK, with the average interview lasting nearly an hour.

As noted in Methodology, I created a short Survey Monkey questionnaire online prior to conducting the main interviews which would form the basis of this project. This was to gage

interest and to try out some questions. This did not prove very successful, but did yield several responses from US bisexual Christians ( $n=8$ ). Their answers are found in **Appendix 4**, along with the survey questions.

## **11.2 Participant Demographics**

Twenty-four of those interviewed currently resided in the US at the time of interview, with two based in the UK at present, both on academic grounds. In terms of ethnic diversity, 21 Caucasians, two Latinos, one Hispanic, one African-American, and one Taiwanese American were interviewed. Participants came from fourteen States in total, with the most respondents coming from the southern states of Tennessee ( $n=5$ ) and Georgia ( $n=4$ ) and the eastern state of Massachusetts ( $n=3$ ). Both east and west coasts were well covered, with the only significant absence in coverage being the Midwest, with just two states, Ohio and South Dakota, represented.

All participants identified as bisexual and cisgendered, except for one, who identified as both bisexual and gender queer. In total, 20 cisgendered females, five cisgendered males and one gender queer (biological male) were interviewed. The youngest participant was aged 18 and the eldest 65, and the mean average age was 32, making this a younger research cell than its UK counterpart by six years. This can be explained by the larger number of college students interviewed owing to the snowball effect at a college in Tennessee ( $n=5$ ).

In terms of employment, interviewees ranged from clergy, professionals and academics to musicians, entertainers, activists and students. All self-identified as Christian at the point of interview except one, who no longer claimed a religious affiliation. All participants had experience of identifying as bisexual within a church environment in the US in line with project criteria.

Initial and detailed coding of transcription manuscripts revealed the following categories and sub-categories and it is these categories which formed the basis of this chapter. The relevant chapters and sub-sections are highlighted in brackets in **Table 11.2**.



Table 11.1. RC4 Bisexual Christians in the US

	Name	Profession	Age	Interview	Denomination
401	Luis (M)	Office worker, Georgia	33	Skype Audio	Evangelical
402	Su (F)	Entertainment Industry Worker,	23	Skype Audio	PCA
403	Elmo (M)	Office Intern, Georgia	25	Skype Video	7 <sup>th</sup> Day Adventist
404	Sammi (F)	Church Volunteer, DC	28	Skype Video	PCA
405	Jennifer (F)	Session Musician, Rhode Island	22	Skype Audio	PCA
406	Cheryl (F)	Student, Tennessee	22	Skype Video	Inter Varsity F'ship
407	Liz (F)	Student, Tennessee	18	Skype Video	Ukirk
408	Melissa (F)	Student, Tennessee	19	Questionnaire	Evangelical
409	Dani (F)	Student, Florida	23	Questionnaire	Catholic
410	Jason (M)	Designer, Massachusetts	40	Face to Face	Ex-Evangelical
411	Jay (M)	Nuclear Technician, Washington	27	Questionnaire	Ex-Protestant
412	Catherine (F)	Priest, Ohio	38	Questionnaire	PCA
413	Freda (F)	Unemployed, Tennessee	29	Skype Video	7 <sup>th</sup> Day Adventist
414	Bix (F)	Unspecified, Washington	37	Questionnaire	Pentecostal (4sq.)
415	Martha (F)	Student, Florida	29	Skype Audio	Evangelical
416	Dee (F)	Church Worker, Georgia	29	Face to Face	PCUSA
417	Meredith (F)	Church Volunteer, Pennsylvania	65	Skype Audio	PCUSA
418	Elizabeth (F)	Administrator, Connecticut	30	Face to Face	Catholic
419	Eira (GQM)	Designer, Massachusetts	37	Face to Face	Quaker
420	Amy (F)	Office worker, Georgia	29	Face to Face	Southern Baptist
421	Toni (F)	Lawyer, California	51	Skype Audio	Unitarian
422	Carrie (F)	Environmental Technician,	35	Cell-phone	Quaker
423	Jain (F)	IT worker, Texas	48	Face to Face	UCC
424	Gabriela (F)	Unspecified, California	29	Questionnaire	UCC
425	Des (M)	Church worker, Virginia	25	Skype Video	Episcopal
426	Laurie (F)	Academic, South Dakota	30	Questionnaire	UCC

Table 11.2. Coding Categories & Sub-Categories for RC4

Main Category	Sub Category
Research Cell 4 Introduction (11.1 & 2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participants &amp; Methodology (11.1)</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participant Demographics (11.2)</li> </ul>
Concept of Bisexuality (11.3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Different understandings of bisexuality</li> </ul>
Faith & Concepts of the Divine (11.4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>God/Jesus as affirming</li> <li>Faith in God alive or dead?</li> </ul>
Bisexual Mental Health (11.5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mental Health related to sexuality/spirituality conflict</li> <li>Mental Health related to other factors (sexual abuse, SAD, Autistic Spectrum Disorders)</li> <li>Legitimacy of identity</li> </ul>
Relationships (11.6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gender related difference in attraction</li> </ul>
Self-actualisation (Coming Out Stories) (12.1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Age at which recognised bisexuality</li> <li>Coming out process</li> <li>Conversion therapy</li> </ul>
Attitude of church per denomination (12.2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Churches' attitude to bisexual Christians</li> <li>Availability of bi resources &amp; bi erasure</li> </ul>
Polyamory (12.3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Positive attitudes to polyamory</li> <li>Negative attitudes to polyamory</li> </ul>
Self-image (12.4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Positive aspects of being bisexual (12.4.1)</li> <li>Negative aspects of being bisexual (12.4.2)</li> </ul>
The Future (12.5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How bisexual Christians view the future</li> </ul>
Conclusion (12.6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Concluding thoughts</li> </ul>

### 11.3 Conceptualisation of Bisexuality

As with previous research cells, all participants were asked how they conceptualised bisexuality, as a means of clarifying that the framework within which they located their sexuality was in line with project criteria. The majority espoused the current standard response of 'attraction to more than one gender,' or variations on this theme, such as Freda's definition - 'It means I'm attracted to people of my own gender, but also of a gender different to mine' - or Martha's inclusion of non cisgendered and gender fluid individuals: 'able to experience attraction to more than one gender, including non-binary genders or non-traditional genders.'

Along similar lines, Dee responded: 'I would say for me, it's a person who experiences attraction, either romantically or sexually or both, to people of multiple genders, of their gender and other genders.' She also acknowledged that she did not always identify as cisgendered herself.

Eira, who is not cisgendered, stated: 'The reasons I feel comfortable claiming the word for myself is that I have fallen for people of many different genders and no gender.'

Cheryl commented: '[It's] one person being attracted to both genders. I don't see anything derogatory or negative about it. The word homosexual, on the other hand, has other connotations for me. I hate reading it; I hate hearing it.'

Elizabeth stated that she both conceptualised and experienced bisexuality as a 'pretty wide spectrum:'

For myself, I tend to describe it as being attracted to more than one, or more than two genders... I am attracted to more than two genders. I have the capacity of being attracted to people who have a gender the same as mine and also different to mine, too. So cisgendered, trans, gender queer people... and not just sexually attracted, but romantically, emotionally, physically... it's a pretty wide spectrum for me; I'm pretty fluid in this way. It changes.

Others stipulated the nuanced variation that gender was irrelevant, though agreed there was some conflation with the pansexual identity in this regard. For example, Des remarked:

It gets dicey cos there's all that talk now about – what is it? – pansexuality. So in my experience, it's attraction to both males and females... I've seen it said, two or more genders. I have not personally been attracted to a transgender person or a gender fluid person or whatever... but I can say, in my experiences, that I've been attracted to men and women.

While Sammi replied: 'I'm probably closer to the... pansexual identity, but I'm bisexual for a political reason. Like to me, it's kind of... your gender presumably makes no difference to me.'

Su identified as both queer and bisexual, though acknowledged 'to all intents and purposes I am bisexual.' For Su, bisexual was an administrative descriptor, for use on demographic data etcetera, while queer was more of a cultural identity.

For Jason, there was always a sexual component:

For me personally, there's the definition of being attracted to genders like your own and genders different than your own, which is certainly true for me. Operationally, it means I feel the capacity to be sexually and/or romantically attracted to any gender... for me, for the romance, there's always the sexual component... it's being romantically and sexually attracted to any gender.

Toni, however, couched it in less mechanical and more romantic terms as 'loving more than one gender.' Martha had simply come to the logical conclusion as a teenager: 'I'm not monosexual, therefore I am bisexual.'

Amy was still grappling with her sexual identity: 'It's always evolving. I most identify with queer, sometimes gay, but I'm flirting with the bisexual identity... it's something I'm working out.'

#### **11.4 Faith and Concepts of the Divine**

As well as clarifying their bisexual identity, all participants were also asked to confirm that they currently, or had previously, identified as Christian in line with the criteria for this study. They were also asked how they viewed the interaction between their spirituality and sexuality, and whether they saw God/Jesus as bi-affirming.

Luis highlighted the need for him to maintain both strands – spirituality and sexuality - in his life:

The most important thing to me is to be able to be okay in sexuality and maintain my faith. I want to be able to be ok with being bisexual and having thoughts about men, and at the same time, still be able to pray and, you know, seek forgiveness for all my sins.

A number of participants expressed the view that God had created them bisexual. Luis stated: 'I like men, I like women, and at the same time, I have a God that made me, that loves me the way I am. He made me this way, that all that matters.'

For others, bisexuality was almost an affliction, a somewhat confusing cross to bear, deliberately bestowed upon the recipient by God for positive ends. Su, from a conservative Presbyterian tradition and not bisexually active at the time of interview, commented: 'I have mixed feelings about where I sit with what does God want for me?... I do believe God put this upon me, to help me grow and serve his body.'

Jennifer, also from the strict branch of the Presbyterian Church, did not see her bisexuality as something to embrace in any capacity:

Christianity told me I should be with a man. I experience same sex attraction but I guess I view it as part of our sinful nature and I think so many different things are also part of that sinful nature. So I'm not just saying same sex attraction is sinful. I believe we are so deeply broken that we can't even pinpoint the roots of our sin. So it's hard for me just to make it black and white.

Jason, meanwhile, had rejected Christianity both to his own negative experiences in the evangelical church and at Methodist Seminary, but also due to the negative cultural connotations associated with the Christian identity. He made a radical suggestion that Christianity was rebranded:

I also feel a certain sadness about Christianity, because all the wonderful liberal progressive Christians I know have to spend half of their efforts, in the midst of doing their good works, doing damage control for their brand name. And that's a shame. I feel like, you know, maybe we could all just come up with a different name and do something else and it would be the same people, and you'd be more effective at your good works and tend to your flock...

The negative associations with Christianity were highlighted by Bix as well: 'I prefer the simplicity of 'I love Jesus' over 'Christian.' Meanwhile, Dani remarked: 'Christian makes me think of evangelical sects for whatever reason.'

Jason, whilst conceding that the door was not completely shut on the faith, also felt there was insufficient evidence to deify Christ:

Operationally I call myself an atheist, but that's not without a respect for phenomena and possibilities... I do feel it's very important to me that I don't identify as Christian because it's Christ and I don't personally believe or I feel I have enough information to know that I could believe that anything particularly supernatural may or may not have occurred... I can't put Jesus on a higher shelf than 75 other incredible teachers and historically don't get the same exultation.

Others had rejected Christianity owing to a punitive concept of God. Jay stated: 'A major reason I am no longer a Christian is because I felt I couldn't follow a religion or deity that chose to condemn me for being bisexual.'

Amy commented that while she now saw the Bible and Jesus as bi-affirming, that had not always been the case, owing to a strict fundamentalist upbringing. Explaining why it had taken her so long to come out as LGBT, Amy remarked:

It was very much a reaction to the Southern Baptist Church and the theology that I grew up with. And it was a reaction to the image of God that I was taught as a Southern Baptist and I didn't know how to reconcile this really authoritarian, hateful damnation image of God with the loving image of God that I was told was actually true. So there was a disconnect between kind of the two images of God I was taught as a child, and I rejected the hateful one and eventually came back to the loving one.

Elizabeth expressed a deep faith and saw no conflict within herself between her bisexuality and spirituality. However, she felt frustrated that she felt unable to share an embodied faith as a bisexual woman attending church:

I think my relationship with God hasn't changed, not even through different sort of denominations or different religions I've been through. My relationship with God has always been really strong. I've never identified as atheist, I've always known like, even when I wasn't going to church and I felt almost isolated.... I always had that connection with God. So it would just be an added benefit that I could have a relationship with God that I could share with others, and all facets of my identity included in that.

For Toni, she saw her own openness to loving a range of people reflected in the range of spiritual traditions and concepts of God offered by her local Unitarian Universalist church:

... my spirituality and my sexuality are very parallel... I'm very open to loving a wide range of people and I'm also open to loving a wide range of what I call 'hearts of God', because I believe that God is so big that we couldn't possibly see all of it. I think that's true about people's genders and sex... I love that diversity of sex and gender and I feel the same way about religion and spirituality, well specifically spirituality. I feel that God fills a lot of spaces, from Jesus to nature and a lot of things that we can't see and don't realise. I don't feel like I have to pick one. So the bottom line is, I don't feel like I have to pick one when I decide who to love, and I don't feel like I have to pick one when I talk about what God I can love.

Eira, who identified as Gender Queer and Quaker, perhaps went one step further in claiming gender was a human construct not a divine creation: 'I think that Jesus is not aware of gender, except as a system we've created.'

Carrie, also Quaker, initially experienced a disconnect between Christianity and sexuality, owing to her experiences of Christian fundamentalists but now understood Jesus as an affirming figure:

I don't think there's any conflict at all. First of all, when I first came out, I wasn't Christian. I thought Christians were mean. But you know, as time went on, I discovered that was not the core of Christianity and that, you know, ultimately Jesus was about unconditional love for human beings, and, you know, just seeing the good in everybody... he got killed for challenging the authorities of his day and sticking up for people who were marginalised and living under empires. So I get that there are people who say, well there are parts of the bible that say you can't be gay and that's an abomination and stuff. I guess I don't read any of that stuff. Coming to Christianity as an adult, I've kind of had a take what you like and leave the rest kind of attitude... I think as far as what Jesus actually said, you know, there is nothing in the bible that has Jesus saying anything about homosexuality, good or bad, but I did see him standing up for marginalised people. I don't think if he was here today that his biggest concerns would be, you know, same-sex partners... he'd be much more concerned about wars and terrorism and poverty and all of those things.

Jason, a former theological student, felt that the Bible was affirming in ethos, if not explicitly:

... you've got Galatians, where you've got Paul saying, you know, neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female... we're all one in Christ. That's pretty inclusive. But not specifically bi affirming actually, not that I can think of right off the bat. I also like the fruit of the spirit in Ephesians, where it's got those bullet points, love, peace... if you have all these then you have the Spirit of God, no other test, then that's it. So whether you're a bisexual toddler or an atheist investment banker, then if you have those characteristics, then the Spirit of God is within you. There's definitely scripture that's affirming.

However, he pointed to the violent uses for which Scripture could be employed, which were not affirming of sexual and other minorities:

The hard thing about Scripture is the Irish proverb, which is, you can't get the piss out of the soup... obviously Christianity is using the text of the Bible, which is full of some genocidal psycho God, as well as the voice of prophecy and social justice... so there may always be a risk of having one or more people in the organisation – if they're not being tended to pastorally – who will graft onto those ideas and take them and run with them... So being superglued to this text, to call it sacred, to call it essential, when it's so full of real atrocities, like awfully disgusting things... it's scary stuff, actually frightening, and that terrifies me about all religions. That's why I can't go back to any church, mosque, anything anymore. Just can't, too scary, cos out of those passages come the actual manifestations of things, like my friend getting beaten up for looking queer... they kicked the crap out of him.

## **11.5 Mental Health**

As with bisexual Christians in the UK, adverse mental health was a common experience among those interviewed.

However, it not always clear whether minority stress in the form of biphobia or bi erasure was solely to blame for poor mental health among those interviewed, or whether other factors came into play. For example, a number of participants were victims of childhood sexual abuse, and the outworking of this trauma combined with erotophobic church teachings on sexuality often resulted in poor self-esteem and self-flagellation. Luis was abused by men and noted:

It happened and I repressed that... the mind always made me think of men, I tried to fight back. I have a pornography addiction. I think my cross-dressing and attraction [to men]... is in actually repressing that. I've gone to counselling for the past two to three years just to talk about my past and sexual abuse... I would say that maybe last year is when finally, you know, sitting there, I said, though I've never been, with a man willingly, I know that I'm attracted to men and that I'm bisexual. So over the past year or less, that's when I've begun to accept that I'm bi and a crossdresser.

Meanwhile, Sammi revealed: 'I have PTSD and anxiety. Whether or not that's linked to my sexuality.... I was abused as a child, I was raped. It's probably all very tied up.'

Bix noted in her questionnaire: 'I've battled depression/anxiety, PTSD most of my life due to sexual abuse when I was four and how I was raised (fear of God due to my mother).'

Dee noted: 'I write and speak openly about being a survivor of childhood sexual abuse.' She did not believe it affected her sexuality, but felt that it did impact on her ability to be intimate in relationships. Dee also revealed that she had struggled with self-harm throughout her life in the form of cutting. She linked this both to her sexuality and 'family stuff' and added that she carried 'a deeply rooted sense of insecurity and personal worthlessness' despite a confident exterior. This manifested itself in 'significant self-injury' though never suicidal thoughts.

Others had not been victims of sexual abuse yet presented mental health issues not necessarily related to their sexuality. For example, Jennifer commented:

OCD has manifest itself over the years. Handwashing and doing things in certain numbers... It definitely manifests itself in a spiritual way. I'm not sure exactly how it ties into my sexuality but I know it affects who I talk to about it and just how I deal with it, I guess. I'm not sure if it's tied in to my sexuality itself.



Along similar lines, Carrie stated that 'I have an Obsessive Compulsive Disorder; I've had it since a kid,' but when asked whether she felt it was linked to her faith and/or sexuality, replied, 'No I don't think so.'

Amy revealed a teenage hairpulling habit that had occurred around the time she first experienced same sex attraction as a teenager. Amy felt this was probably linked to her sexuality:

I started to have trichotillomania, which is hair-pulling, which is linked to anxiety. So that's something I also started to experience when I was thirteen. I don't know if these two things are really connected, but I guess they could be. I don't do that anymore, but I do other stuff that's related. I think there's an experience of an anxiety and depression that's related to marginalisation. It's certainly what my experience of the world has been.

Toni spoke of an existing bipolar disorder, which was exacerbated by conflict in the church:

I always was bipolar, just the way my brain chemistry is wired. I've been like that since a kid. It makes me more sensitive to stress and stress sets it off and makes it worse, so the stressor of being both treated badly in the church because of my sexuality and also being treated badly in the LGBT community because of my bisexuality – both of those are stressors which affect my mental health.

Jain felt she could have possibly inherited her father's bipolar disorder, describing herself as 'a functioning depressed' with a chemical imbalance in her brain. Her depression, in her view, was not linked to her sexuality, though she believed a recent spate of suicidal thoughts was linked to coming out as bisexual.

For Jay, it was the church's biphobic explanation of existing health issues that added to his depressive mood: 'I suffer from depression and epilepsy and many times was told it was either an attack by Satan or God punishing me for my orientation.'

Amy also spoke of a genetic predisposition towards depression running in her family, as well as suffering from Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), though she did also acknowledge that a conservative church climate had also played its part in both her anxiety and depression:

I directly connect those things to my growing up experience... growing up in a place where I was told that I was never enough. I got saved, I was baptised twice – and I grew up Southern Baptist, and it's not something that Southern Baptists do. I was baptised when I was seven and seventeen, and I had walked down the aisle to be recommitted probably five times in between. I was constantly thinking that I had done something to undermine my own salvation.

Fortunately this lack of spiritual assurance did not lead to suicide attempts: 'It definitely crosses my mind sometimes, but I've never made a plan, never been that far.'

Elizabeth also felt that a history of family depression, as well as a difficult childhood, had contributed to her mental health, though she did also feel that institutional biphobia within both the secular and church LGBT communities had been a key factor, too: 'I think that the biphobia that I experienced, the bi erasure, has certainly contributed to, I think, low self-esteem issues, at times depression – not feeling like I can be myself, be open and affirmed.'

A number of participants revealed autistic spectrum disorders, which resulted in anxiety irrespective of sexuality related factors. Luis stated: 'I am anxious and have seasonal depression. I'm not sure if it's related to faith and sexuality. I don't think so. I think it's just me being ADHD.' Jason also revealed that he had ADD.

Dani felt it was too simplistic to single out her sexuality as the root cause of her anxiety, listing 'the guilt complex that comes with being Catholic' as well as 'my job, my relationship, my friendships, my future' as equally to blame for 'spiralizing negative thought cycles.'

Freda felt her father's alcoholism and being bullied at school for being overweight and wearing glasses were just as much of a factor in her depression as being bisexual in a strict Adventist community.

Others, however, expressed a clear and unambiguous link between depressive illness and sexuality-related conflict in the church or with Christian parents. Melissa perhaps gave the most clear-cut and disturbing account of this:

When I first recognised my feelings of a same-sex attraction to someone, my anxiety and depression began. I knew that I wasn't in control of my attraction and that scared me, especially when thinking about how God, the world, my family, and my friends would view me. I had the belief that I was a sinner because of my sexuality and that I would go to Hell. I tried so hard to hold back and deny myself of this attraction, but it made my anxiety and depression so much worse. I pleaded to God and asked 'Why me?' over and over and I didn't know what to do. One day I just realised that God wants me to be happy. He doesn't want me to hate myself, or hold back who I truly am, or want to die. So I finally accepted myself and the anxiety and depression went away for a while... until I told my mom about my same-sex relationship. Her reaction and negative words affected me and hurt me so badly that the anxiety and depression came back even stronger and continued to worsen over time. I experienced self-hate, obsessive thoughts, constant worry and deep depression. My body physically changed as well. I often got nauseous and would throw up regularly when my anxiety got so

bad. I developed an eating disorder in which I could not eat without throwing up and I lost 15 pounds. I became very weak and gloomy, feeling dread every day. I tried an anti-anxiety medication, Lexapro, and after taking it for three days, I had the worse anxiety attack I have ever experienced and voluntarily admitted myself to a psychiatric hospital for three days. During these three days, I was able to heal many of the wounds that I had felt for the past five months since coming out to my mom.

While Jennifer did not currently feel living out her bisexuality was an option owing to her beliefs, she did acknowledge that sexual repression probably explained her sense of detachment, linking her experiences to those of British Christian worship leader, Vicky Beeching<sup>138</sup>:

I think sometimes I feel pretty detached, like very grey. I'm not really able to experience things well, because of the way that I'm thinking. And I think the way my body works just keeps me from living a lot of the time. I mean I definitely think it could be tied in with secrets I keep or ways I'm closed off about certain things. I mean, that's kind of why I've been exhausted from it lately.

Cheryl stated that while she had never taken medication, 'I've definitely had depression... a lot of that was the reconciling of my faith and sexuality.'

For Liz, trouble at home and in the church over her bisexuality had caused clear anxiety and internal conflict:

I was in a very home situation for a while, so I would definitely say that caused a lot of depression. And I definitely think the whole relationship between bisexuals and Christians, and like the struggle that has been presented to me based on the church I've grown up in... that has definitely caused a lot of internal conflict... Like some days, yeah, I'm queer and I love Jesus and other days I'm like, is it really okay? Am I just making this up to make myself feel better? Maybe what they say is true; maybe I'm just justifying it.

Jason attributed his dysthymia, which he defined as 'a low-watt bulb version of depression,' to his experiences within the evangelical church:

Like many cult survivors, I feel like I have a sort of lost decade, of feelings of regret. I lost much of my formative years when maybe I could have been dating more freely or exploring my sexuality or any of that kind of stuff. And there's a lot of sadness about that. Who knows who I would have met? I could have felt freer, enjoyed college more, just being out in the world as opposed to being in a very isolated and sort of sequestered thing, where I was just leading Bible Studies all the time.

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<sup>138</sup> See <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/news/vicky-beeching-star-of-the-christian-rock-scene-im-gay-god-loves-me-just-the-way-i-am-9667566.html>

One of the adolescent experiences Jason felt he had missed out on was ‘the flourishing and sort of natural organic blooming of my personal sexuality.’ He continued, using a biblical metaphor from John’s gospel<sup>139</sup>: ‘It sort of feels like a vine was pruned a little ruthlessly and all those experiences and thoughts were just dormant... more than dormant, just not allowed. And that obviously expands into any sort of healthy sexuality.’

Jason went on to describe how he felt forced into ‘an emotional shotgun wedding’ by his pastors and youth leaders. When he finally left the church behind, ‘it was such a low point and I ended up going on anti-depressants... I had suicidal ideas and all kinds of things like that.’

For Freda, the strict Seventh-day Adventist community had a large influence on both her depression and her decision so far to remain in the closet to all but a few close friends:

I think lately being bisexual has affected my mental health, mostly from fretting over whether or not to come out. Part of me wants to so badly, because I want a kid like me growing up in the Adventist system to know it’s valid, that what they feel is real... Part of me so badly wants to be that person - just by existing, just by living, that I can show someone like me that they matter, that they’re valid, that even if they decide to never tell anyone but themselves, telling themselves matters... I want to be that person, but I can’t do that if I’m not out.

However, there were clear consequences for Freda and her straight husband, if she chose to come out, which she outlined to me in tears:

But in my church, in the Adventist Church, being out could very well mean I’d never be allowed to work in a school of any kind, in a university or high school... I’d never be allowed to teach Sabbath school, to be a leader in any capacity. My being out could mean that my husband couldn’t get jobs at certain places because of his wife... so it could limit our ability to live, like financially support ourselves. And it’s this huge conflict and I literally think about it every single day. [Crying] I just genuinely want to be genuine and be myself, and not just me existing, be like this horrible thing. I don’t want another kid to feel like me growing up.

Others differentiated between faith-related and non-faith related explanations of depressive incidence. For example, Laurie commented: ‘I suffer from both depression and anxiety (anxiety being, in many ways, the cause of the depression), but I don’t know that they’re specifically related to concerns about my faith or my sexuality.’ However, she did feel that her suicidal thoughts were definitely linked to her faith/sexuality conflict:

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<sup>139</sup> See John 15:2

During the time, I think it was. My various disorders were not diagnosed and I was having a crisis of faith over what I had thought God was telling me versus what was actually happening in my life, and suicide began to look like a reasonable response to that disconnect.

Catherine felt social isolation due to bisexuality was at the heart of her depression: 'It wasn't so much about the interaction between sexuality and faith. My sense of depression had to do with not knowing other bisexual people of faith. So I felt excluded in both faith spaces and LGBT spaces.'

The need for pretense was another psychological manifestation of the faith/sexuality conflict. When Liz needed to keep a place at college and hold her family together, she decided to play the role of model daughter to her 'extremely conservative Christian' parents, particularly her father:

I did a thing of acting, so it's like, well, this can just be my next biggest acting job. So the next few months, I basically worked on this character, which was developing myself into the girl that they thought was the perfect Liz... So I'd have bullet points: right, convince him that you've changed your mind about this. It had to be gradual, right, for them to believe it. You have to argue with him on this, let him convince you, then agree.

This act had been going on for some time:

Whenever I visit... my parents would kind of do weekly check-ins on how I was doing, or like how my sexuality was doing, you know? And we had one of those at Thanksgiving and it like really messed with my head, and it really got me... he was like, 'are you pursuing women at college?'... I was like, 'No, Dad, of course not, I'm choosing my faith, I'm' – whatever I had to say. It makes my skin crawl every time. Basically, the main reason I'm doing it, is because they're paying for my college and it seems shallow, but I realised that I don't have the resources on my own to pay for it.

Liz also felt the need to protect her younger brothers from the fundamentalist views of her parents:

I really debated moving out, but I have two younger brothers and I love them, and I can't like leave them in a house where they're being told all these lies about a faith that I believe is still true, but my parents just have a wrong idea about it. So I don't want to leave my brothers in a situation where they're going to be continually fed these lies about Jesus and a Father God who's loving, and they see me bawling at 4am because my dad has just yelled at me... this is Christianity? This is what Jesus is? And that's such a misrepresentation.

Bix described how she was raised 'in a very toxic, confining environment' where she felt 'trapped and suicidal as an adolescent.' She added: 'I learned to hide my sexuality in an effort

to fit into a Christian culture I didn't even like. It came out in anxiety and assuming rejection from others.'

For others, questions over the legitimacy of their bisexual identity proved troubling. Dani noted:

I do have anxiety, but I don't blame my faith or sexuality as root causes. I think it's more accurate to say that my brain latches onto, for example, the imposter syndrome of being a bi woman who has never been in a relationship with another woman.

Freda also expressed anxiety at how she would be perceived as a bisexual woman at a local Pride event in the UK, where she was temporarily living.

I could go if I wanted, but I'm scared about going, because are people like going to go, why are you even here? You don't belong here. And I don't know how to counter that, because I know for some people, the fact that I've never dated a woman matters, makes me not queer enough, or not bisexual enough.

Unlike Freda, Martha had come out as bisexual, but felt that her heterosexual privilege as a bisexual woman married to a straight man could lead to others questioning her LGBT credentials:

I feel the pressure to advocate for LGBT inclusion and that's why I came out... but at the same time, I have so much privilege in comparison, in terms of not being mistreated. Because I'm with a partner of the opposite sex, I don't want to claim I don't have that privilege... I feel being honest in the attempt for advocacy could look sometimes like claiming a place, a position that others might think I don't really have, I guess. So it's sort of a little bit of a bug in conundrum, I suppose. How to be part of the community and advocacy, even though I have so much sort of comparative passing privilege, whether I want it or not.

Martha did express occasional suicide ideation linked to bi erasure though this was historic: 'When I was most depressed, [I had] the occasional suicide ideation, like I'm holding a knife or driving off the highway or something like that. But not really serious.'

Gabriela also referred to the legitimacy issue: '[I] definitely have some anxiety about being queer enough - specifically around my bisexuality still being 'relevant' if I'm married to a cis heterosexual man.'

This was also true of Des:

There's still a lot of anxiety, especially within the LGBT community, how out do I want to be? Especially being married. So I have the situation where I could very easily play the heterosexual, you know, normal married guy with a wife, and no one would have

any reason to ever question that. And so by admitting that I am bisexual, it just brings in a whole group of factors. And there is an anxiety about lesbian, gay or transgender folks saying, 'you're just on your way to being gay.' They're looking at me sceptically if I show up to a diversity meeting or something.

In line with therapist Michael Salas' comments in Chapter 10, Des spoke a lot of the shame he felt at his feelings towards other men:

I felt like I couldn't talk to anyone about that, because there was such a deep, deep shame... so dated this woman and kind of put my experience in high school and my relationships with men behind, and thought maybe that this was just something I was doing as a rebellious teenager, and let it go at that.

Des discussed how he had gradually become more comfortable with his bisexual male identity:

Part of my mental health struggles are... the not knowing where I fit, if I fit, not knowing if I'm normal in the experience of gay men or straight men, you know, because bisexuality is not talked about very much and there's not much publicity about it... surely I'll wake up one day and realise, you know, I'm either straight or gay and this kind of dancing in the middle is just my process of getting there. But I've come to the point where I don't think that's true and I've heard more and more bisexual people speak up about their similar experience.

For Des, being more honest with himself and his wife has led to greater mental stability, and spoke of 'really coming to terms with the bisexual label.'

For Toni, her experiences of homophobia and biphobia had led to a mistrust of Christians and Christian leaders, which impacted on her ability to feel at peace in church settings:

That... has had an effect on my relationship to religion since. Since leaving that last church, I've been very wary of ministers, even in the Unitarian Church, where they're very supportive. I have a mistrust of the priesthood that I didn't have before. I'm a Christian, but I distrust Christians, specifically people who are preaching.

To be openly bisexual in a church setting meant for Toni that: 'You absolutely have to make yourself incredibly vulnerable.'

## **11.6 Relationships**

While concepts such as heterosexual privilege are considered under 11.7 *Mental Health* and 12.4 *Positive and Negative Experiences of Bisexuality*, this section focuses on how bisexual Christians in this research cell relate to genders similar to or different to their own, within or outside of relationships.

Dee described herself as ‘heteroromantic’, experiencing romantic thoughts for the opposite sex and sexual attraction to the same sex.

Luis also felt more sexual around the same sex, reserving romantic feelings for his wife: ‘Us guys are a lot more physical... when I picture me with a man, it’s, you know, definitely clothes off or clothes are coming off... I cannot picture myself in a romantic relationship with a man whatsoever.’

Jennifer, despite being sexually attracted to women, did not view a female partner as an option at this point in her faith journey: ‘I wouldn’t want to be in a relationship with a woman. Though that attraction is still there, I just view it differently.’

Cheryl, who admitted that she had never had a relationship with a male or female partner, felt that a relationship with another bisexual person might be advantageous: ‘I think the communication would be a lot better, there’d be less risk of sharing information.’

Jason found dating same sex and opposite sex individuals difficult:

Dating straight people is hard and dating gay men is hard. I mean, there could be a gay man I’m attracted to, but they sometimes have the same misconceptions as straight people... it’s sometimes even more painful to have these misconceptions come from gay men, because they’re supposed to be part of the LGBT community and be more understanding. So dating is frustrating.

Freda noted the fluidity of her sexuality:

Sometimes I joke with my friends that literally the only man in the world that I find attractive is my husband... [but] there’s some weeks where I’m just super into guys and I notice a lot of really attractive men. It fluctuates all the time.

Jain felt the menopause had an influence on her object of attraction:

I have ... more sexual feelings for women at this time in my life and I think that has a lot to do with the menopause... men just kind of annoy me right now. But I think it has to do with hormones and things like that.

These observations clarified the fluidity of bisexual Christians in this survey over the lifetime, a fluidity that binary and monosexual thought systems struggle to contain.

## **Conclusion**

For my concluding thoughts on Research Cell 4 overall, please see 12.6 *Concluding Thoughts*.



It was clear that, as with UK bisexual Christians, there was some degree of overlap with pansexuality, in terms of how bisexuality was understood. It was notable also that Americans were more likely to identify as queer and use that identifier over the more prevalent LGBT in the UK. This would make an interesting study in itself for the future.

In terms of spirituality, it was clear that concepts of the divine became broader within multi-faith traditions such as Quakerism and Unitarianism.

As with the UK, it was too simplistic to say that the unique stressors linked to bisexuality alone were responsible for adverse mental health in bisexual Christians. Four of those interviewed were victims of childhood sexual abuse and several reported other psychological or autistic spectrum disorders which impacted on mental health as well. It was deemed beyond the scope of this study to examine what effect the aforementioned had on individual mental well-being.

With concern to relationships, it was clear that gender preference was fluid for some over the lifetime. Others reported heteromanticism, experiencing romantic feelings for the opposite sex, and predominantly sexual feelings for the same sex – though this could be the result of heteronormative cultural conditioning.



## CHAPTER 12

### Bisexual Christians and Church Life in the US

This chapter carries on from Chapter 11: *Bisexual Christians in the US* by looking specifically at the church experiences of participants, from coming out to parents and pastors, to the current climate within their chosen denominations. Do these findings confirm or contradict the information shared by their pastors and educators in Chapters 9 and 10? A description of the major Christian denominations with the US can be found in **Appendix 9**.

#### 12.1 Self actualisation

This first section looks at what age participants became aware of their bisexual identity. As church plays such a central role in American life, compared to the UK, coming out narratives were almost uniformly linked to church experience, therefore making it appropriate to locate this section within this account of US church life. This section also considers whether aversion therapy of any description took place.

Elizabeth described an awareness of dual attraction at eight years old:

I always would hear gay or straight, heterosexual, homosexual... I was born in 1985... I didn't see a lot in terms of bisexuality or bisexuals. That was never discussed with me. The only thing I discovered about my sexuality was that I noticed I was attracted to my male classmates and my female classmates. I was probably eight years old.

She finally discovered the term bisexuality four years later:

I was 12 years old and I was at my father's house... I was thinking about it one day, because I always sort of realised that something was different about me. Because, you know, I had had these feelings that weren't being talked about... and I was on the internet and I typed into it 'I like girls and boys' and bisexual popped up. And I said, 'well, that's what I am.' I was like, 'Oh, I have a word for it, I have a name for it.'

However, other participants were late to accept their bisexuality. Luis, aged 33 and a victim of childhood sexual abuse, commented:

I would say that maybe last year is when finally, you know, sitting there, I said 'though I've never been with a man willingly, I know that I'm attracted to men and that I'm bisexual. So over the past year or less, that's when I've begun to accept that I'm bi and I'm a crossdresser.

This followed a confused period as a teenager where Luis conceded, 'I definitely was confused sexually. Am I gay? I would go in gay chatrooms and talk dirty to other guys. What am I?' He described how a friend's father offered to take him to 'a local whorehouse' to clarify his sexuality.

Sammi, another childhood abuse victim, was also a latecomer to the bisexual identity:

The biggest thing was, I didn't know bisexual people existed until I went to college. They talked about the homosexual lifestyle or the gay agenda or something like that. So I was aware of same sex relationships, but I didn't know that someone could be bi, go both ways. I assumed it meant I was lesbian. Then when I got to college and had my first crush on a boy, I assumed I was straight, that God had finally cured me.

It was not until she was married to an opposite sex partner that Dani 'came to terms with my bisexuality.'

For Eira, historical role models informed their decision to identify as bisexual:

I came to it later than I came to the word queer and I think I started to use bisexual for myself when I learnt about the history of bisexuality. I saw myself benefitting from other bisexual people who came before me.

Elmo described his negative experiences with the Seventh-day Adventist Church at the time of coming out as bisexual:

I was asked to leave a Christian campus when I came out. I was 14... they asked me to leave, just for coming out. Whole families would just stop talking to us, like just done. They wouldn't even respond; they didn't even recognise we were there at church anymore. We were going to local supermarket after I got asked to leave, and the pastor of our church at the time was there. And I said, 'Hey Pastor,' and I held my hand out to shake his hand. And he looked at my hand and he walked away from me.

Cheryl expressed self-acceptance of her orientation: 'I'm happy with my orientation... other situations in my life kind of make my faith waiver a bit, but as far as my orientation goes, it's pretty solid.' However, she was careful in disclosing it to others: 'I am in public about it, but only to people who are mature, who can handle it.'

I also asked participants whether they had ever experienced aversion/conversion therapy on coming out as bisexual or same sex attracted. Liz explained to me how churches and organisations avoided such terminology: 'They're not going to call it conversion therapy, that's not how these things work... they just say the word 'talking'; they say the word 'counselling.' So they phrase it more casual than it is.'

Liz, just 18 at the time of interview, described her experience of 'counselling' at length:

... my parents... they're extremely conservative Christians... when they found out, they had a very negative reaction and they decided to send me to conversion therapy. And they thought this was the ultimate downfall of my faith, which is a common view among Christians... Basically they immediately went to my youth pastor, who'd watched me grow up... and they were like, hey, Liz has gone down a wrong path, whatever. So he was basically my therapist. So I would go about two to three times a week for about a month and a half to two months... Day One would be like Step One, and he would be like, 'Okay, so do you realise that what you're doing is wrong? Do you realise that this is a sin? ... Have you read Leviticus?... At first, I was only allowed to go to school and like nothing else... no association with my friends, including a separate church... and then they took away my car, they went through my cell-phone and took that away – so basically cut off my communication with all my friends... it just kept getting worse. My dad would drive me to school every day and talk to me every day about how disgusting and awful and sinful and whatever it was. So every single day I was getting this negative, awful, you know... I would cry every morning before going to school and it just got worse and worse and worse.

Liz went on to describe how she decided to reinvent herself as a model daughter, to avoid more sanctions against her and to continue her college studies, whilst remaining bisexual at heart (see 11.7).

Melissa also described an extremely negative parental reaction, this time from her Catholic mother:

My mother's reaction was terrible; probably the worst possible reaction... she first began to cry heavily, when I was reading aloud to her a letter that I had written to her about falling in love with a girl. The first thing she said through her tears was, 'I will always love you, but I will *never* support this... where is your faith in this? Are you telling me this so you will go out and hold hands with her in public and not care? This is a sin. Do you think you're going to heaven?... You're never going to have children and I'm never going to have grandkids.' Her words were extremely hurtful. She continued, 'I want you to have the life God wants for you. I want you to marry a husband who will love you and cherish you.'... I told her that I am still the same person as before, still her daughter. But she looked at me so differently. She promptly said, 'I will never come around to this.'

Similar to Liz, Melissa was also taken for 'counselling':

My mother did make me go to a counselling session with her, my step-dad and a Christian pastor. She wanted to try to heal our relationship somehow through this. The pastor tried to be a mediator, but often took the stance that I was unholy and that the love I had for my person was not okay. He made me feel that I needed to change and stop 'sinning'... it only added to my self-hate. He referenced the Bible several times and I just remember feeling so misunderstood and judged by him. This good, white, married man that didn't even know me, or my story, and had never been in my shoes,

told me how my choice was so sinful. It was an awful feeling to be judged by someone like that who is Christian.

While Jennifer had not been subjected to aversion therapy herself, she commented on the credibility of it: 'I think there might be a part of it that's a little, maybe, insulting... that this sin specifically... is kind of viewed differently. I don't know of any ministries that do healing for gluttony.'

Whilst Jason had never attended aversion therapy, he described an all-male accountability group at Methodist theological seminary, which reveals erotophobic tendencies within the denomination at that time:

Their theology in particular was that even just thinking about [sex]... any sort of sexual arousal or eroticism... just even a fleeting thought... was literally like someone pounding a spike into Christ's breast. It's all terrible. I was in an accountability group where we would sort of confess our problems and sit around praying for one another. We'd have conferences and special break-out sessions where they'd be all guys, and you'd through stuff, with a lot of weeping and crying. And I'd feel a tremendous guilt for masturbation and things like that. Why can't I get over this, sort of thing.

Catherine described how her parents felt bisexuality was worse than lesbianism, when she came out to them:

They reacted very poorly. They had a harder time with bisexuality than they would have with a gay/lesbian identity. Largely they see bisexuality as willful sin, whereas, while they disapprove of homosexuality, they equate that with a genetic predisposition and therefore have a more gentle (but still disapproving) stance.

Freda expressed similar sentiments:

My husband knows and my close friends know and that's it... I'm not out to my family, or not sort of in general. I think my family would take it weirdly. Honestly, I think it would be easier if I was just a lesbian. I think it would be easier for them to understand if I was just a lesbian.

Bix was also selective in whom she told:

The people I've chosen to tell in my family have been positive. I don't have a good relationship with my mother and I know she would disapprove. Other conservative members know (I'm out on social media) and disapprove in passive-aggressive ways. They never say anything to my face, but post things that are anti-LGBT.

Laurie had 'not really' come out at church and stated, with regard to her family: 'They say they love me, but other than that, they just kind of pretend my orientation doesn't exist, as long as I keep dating people who ID as men.'

Though Jay had supportive parents, his church was less so, viewing bisexuality as a conscious decision: 'They informed me that orientation was entirely a choice and that I was making the wrong one.'

However, it was not just traditionally conservative churches that adopted a negative position towards bisexuality. Dee describes her coming out experience in Georgia at the Metropolitan Community Church:

Sharing our building was a church community of the MCC... so I decided I would go to their pastor who was a lesbian woman. I came out to her as bi... and she pretty much told me that there was no such thing... this would have been in 2006/2007. I had the presence of mind to know that she was wrong at that point.

This denial of bisexuality happened again at Presbyterian seminary, leading Dee to temporarily give up identifying as bisexual: 'By the end of the semester... I did come out to my campus minister, and she was like, 'No, you're not'... So after that, I dropped it. It was basically like I never came out at all.' When Dee decided to come out again as bi, following a period of identifying as lesbian for expediency's sake, she again faced a hostile response, which she attributed to biphobia: 'At that point, there was a lot of negative reaction among my queer friends who were not bi. There were a lot of layers, but I think a large part of it was just a fear of bisexuality.'

Des was another participant who came out as gay, owing to the erasure and stigmatisation of bisexuality:

My faith was very important to me, so I was trying to reconcile my sexuality with my faith. Added in to all of that at the time, was really a very deep confusion about my sexuality, because, as I'm sure you know, bisexuality is not really talked about that much. Even within the LGBT community there is suspicion cast on bisexual folks... so I even in high school came out as gay to some friends and to a youth minister at my local church. That's what made the best sense to do.

Des has since come out as bisexual, though only to his wife. He admits that the recent incident at an Orlando nightclub<sup>140</sup> has challenged his views on not disclosing his sexual orientation: 'I spent most of the day yesterday doing some pretty deep prayer and soul-searching and I think that's going to have to change, going forward.'

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<sup>140</sup> A reference to the shooting at a gay nightclub in Orlando on 12 June 2016, in which 49 mainly Latino people were killed.

Amy describes how her coming out story reveals her own de-legitimisation of bisexuality:

[When] I came out as gay... people said to me at the time, 'Well, Amy, you're 23, you've had boyfriends, you've had a partner who was a guy, you've dated men, don't you think you're bisexual?' And I was so offended by the question. 'No, I'm gay, I'm not bisexual, I'm gay. This thing that I've discovered is way deeper. I'm definitely gay!' It speaks volumes about the view of bisexuality that I had, that I was just horrified that it meant that I wasn't really gay if I was bisexual.

Amy stated that her bisexual identity was still emerging and that this process had involved coming to her own preconceptions around bisexuality:

... I have for a long time been attached to the bi meaning two part of bisexual... I've been in the camp that's had a hard time being comfortable with the word bisexual for those reasons... I went to a Robyn Ochs presentation last year... I've been talking with a lot of people in my life about the word bisexual, whether they use it, why they use it, so I'm doing a lot of that work of myself... I am interested in both men and women and also more genders. In the way that people are reclaiming the word bisexual to mean not just two genders but more genders, do I need to be part of that reclamation effort?

Amy was one of several participants to mention the political aspect of identifying as bisexual, citing Sheri Eisner's *Notes for a Bisexual Revolution* (2013) as key to her explorations: 'I'm really buying into this writer's definitions and understanding why it's important to use the word and how... bisexuality really is a radical identity.'

## **12.2 Attitude of churches per denomination**

A range of Christian traditions featured within this research cell and this section considers how each of these affirm or discredit bisexuality.

Luis, who attends a large evangelical megachurch in Georgia, described a church environment that was superficially welcoming of LGBT people:

They would welcome someone to come in, but they may not allow them, for example, to volunteer with teenagers and kids... I think that's the same reason why they would not want someone who is not married to a person, [or] lives together – they don't want them to volunteer... if I'm a man attracted to a man and I'm with a group of little boys, that could be a little tricky from a liability standpoint, but that's just me speculating.

Luis's comments suggest the church is at least consistent in refusing leadership positions to unmarried heterosexual couples and others who fall short of the heterosexual marriage ideal. He did indicate, however, that a number of his friends had left the church because it had taken a neutral stance on Marriage Equality, rather than opposing it. For this reason, Luis did not feel



safe in coming out as bisexual to his church friends: 'They'd say, 'I support and love you,' [but] I'd probably get some kickback from friends.'

Su also said that her Presbyterian Church took a firm stand on 'living in sin', opposing any extra-marital relationships, yet also same-sex marriage, which it viewed as outside of God's will according to Scripture. This same emphasis on 'Sola Scriptura' also ruled out women pastors in that denomination.

Su described how the collegiate branch of the PCA church had removed her from leadership for dating a girl:

I actually only just went on a first date in my life last year, with a girl. It opened up a kind of can of worms, particularly with my pastors...[it] ended up in me being told I would no longer be serving in leadership in that ministry.

Su stated that she was not aware of any denominational literature that specifically addressed bisexuality, though several members of the congregation had read Wesley Hill's 'Washed and Waiting' (2010) about the need for LGBT Christians to remain celibate.

Sammi, also PCA, confirmed that the only mention of bisexuality at her church was 'when they say the word LGBT.' She had only ever heard bisexuality mentioned at a Gay Christian Network Conference (GCN), when she actually presented on bisexuality. She added: 'It seems like that's the only time bisexuality gets to be addressed. The conference itself isn't hostile to bisexual people; it's just ignored.' However, it appeared that GCN was not overly welcoming of bisexual people within its membership: 'From a conference perspective, I encountered a few people who, on like meet and greet, break-in type things, that once I said I was bisexual, things like eye rolls, scoffs...' Sammi felt that Christians were far more disparaging of bisexual people than the secular LGBT community: 'The LGBT community tends to take a live and let live kind of approach... Christians will be very direct about the fact that my identity was wrong.'

Jennifer, another PCA participant, stated that sexuality, let alone bisexuality, was largely ignored within her congregation: 'It's [bisexuality] usually not brought up. It's usually like you're straight or you're gay. They don't really talk about sexuality much at all at my church.'

Cheryl, currently attending a non-denominational InterVarsity fellowship group but formerly a North American Baptist, stated that she had never heard bisexuality mentioned in a church setting and only ever seen literature pertaining to homosexuality. However, Liz, who attended

Ukirk, a Presbyterian collegiate church, found that her campus church compared favourably with the evangelical church she had attended back at home:

They talk about it... we have a week that's called *Sex & The Soul Week*. This church came in and held a faith and sexuality workshop... It was the first time that I had four adults who all identified as Christian and all identified as queer of some sorts. The most important thing that they've done is just open the conversation about it. With my church back home, it was not brought up until gay marriage. He was a great pastor [but], he never brought up the subject of homosexuality. When gay marriage was passed, he opened up church that day in tears, 'Today is a horrible day for our country.' And I was like, 'Well, now we know how you feel about that.'

Melissa who also attended an evangelical church, stated that she had 'never' heard bisexuality mentioned at church, only the message that 'gay sex is a sin.' She told me that she had never told anyone at church she was bisexual, because she was 'too afraid of being judged there.' She had, however, found an affirming campus group that discussed LGBT issues: 'It is a great place to feel open and unafraid of my sexuality on campus.'

Jason also spoke of homophobia within the conservative evangelical church, coupled with a silence on bisexuality:

While I was in the church, so 1991-2001/2, there was not a word spoken about bisexuality, ever. It was gay, yes, like being gay was certainly spoken of, in a negative way. It was an abomination, etcetera. It [bisexuality] wasn't even on their radar screen... I would hear comments from the youth pastor, for example, about how demonically possessed and depraved and terrible gay people were. Or that they maybe should be pitied, but they seemed to be more directly plugged into Satan – a spectral figure, puppet master kind of thing. You know, not on a part with God himself, but, you know, just sort of doing nasty business. I didn't see people getting beaten up or anything like that... it was just I was made to have this viewpoint that didn't line up with reality.

Catherine, an ordained priest within the Presbyterian Church USA, the more liberal branch of the Presbyterian Church, stated that she had only heard bisexuality mentioned at an event organised by herself. When she had mentioned her bisexuality to clergy and congregants within her church, their responses were often hostile:

In a few contexts people have been supportive/curious/engaged. In most contexts people display varying degrees of hostility ranging from ignoring or displaying no interest in the topic, to proactively trying to silence or refuse to engage with the topic of bisexuality, discouraging me from being completely open or upfront with congregants I serve and to other situations in which people have prohibited me from holding leadership roles or asked me to not participate in leadership of the religious services.

Freda, a Seventh-day Adventist, commented that few Adventists had any idea what bisexuality was, and that activist Eliel Cruz, interviewed in Research Cell 3, was the only person who spoke about bisexuality in the Adventist Church. I asked her how Adventists viewed him:

Not very well. People my age, or people who like me, are either queer or advocate for queer rights within the church or in general society, are excited about what he's doing. But I know a lot of people in the church dislike him a lot. They think he's helping to corrupt young people, that he's basically leading them to sin and fracturing their relationship with God.

Bix, a Pentecostal of the Four Square tradition at that time, noted that people at her church reacted to her bisexuality in 'a variety of ways, depending on the people. Some were positive, others were more challenged by it. Some likened it to alcoholism or something else to be controlled.'

Martha, who attended a contemporary evangelical church called Element 3, stated that her church did not address LGBT issues at all, and that the pastors procrastinated when she asked permission to study Justin Lee's 'Torn' at a church book group. It was finally suggested she held the discussion off the church campus and made her own announcement about it. Martha summarised: 'They're not really affirming, but they're not extremely mean either!'

The silence on bisexuality led Martha to feel obliged to come out, which she had done to her book group and church small group. Of the latter, Martha remarked: 'In the small group, the one pastor who leads the small group thanked me for being honest and sharing. And one other guy was like, 'Hmm, a lot to think about.' And that was it, really.'

While Martha liked the senior pastor at E3, she commented: 'There are some sermons that are just horrible from the other pastors.'

Martha explained that her decision to attend a largely non-affirming evangelical church was based on a compromise with her opposite sex partner, who initially felt that affirming churches were not necessarily preaching sound theology:

He was not sort of affirming of LGBT inclusion at first, though he's moving in that direction now... He did not feel it would be good for his faith if it was fully affirming. Could you be a good pastor if you were fully affirming? So it was trying to sort of find a middle ground where it wasn't horrible.

However, from Martha's comments above, it was clear that there were aspects of church life that did indeed feel horrible.

Elizabeth, a Roman Catholic, was not out as a bisexual either in her current Episcopal Church, or at any Catholic church she had attended in the past, citing past experiences and a fear of polluting her own church experience through hostile reactions:

Because of all the biphobia I experienced in other places, coming out in church where for me, my connection, my relationship with God, is very personal, it's almost private. You know, going into a place of worship and bringing up my bisexuality is particularly vulnerable and scary. More so than when I'm applying for jobs or being in the community or being in a social setting. There's something particularly really frightening about coming out in church. Because for me that feels like a spiritual home.

Elizabeth added: 'A lot of things are considered dirty and wrong.' She did not feel that her 'physical, spiritual, emotional and sexual self is being affirmed or celebrated.' However, it was not the teaching on sexuality alone that prevented her from attending a Catholic church any longer but also 'being a woman and not seeing myself represented in the leadership level.'

Amy stated that she had never heard LGBT issues spoken of in the Southern Baptist church where she grew up and 'definitely not bisexuality.' It was as if LGBT was entirely non-existent. Amy added: 'That's part of the reason it took me so long to come out. It's because it literally was not an option for me.'

Within the more liberal Quaker movement, Eira reported mainly positive experiences of being bisexual as well as gender queer: '...the regional group of Quakers... has been for more than a decade been figuring out how to respond to heterosexism in broader Quakerism. So bisexuality comes up... in those discussions.'

While they had not seen specific bisexual literature, they commented, 'I think I've been to groups and situations where people have talked about their own experience of their sexuality and Quakers and bisexual.' They did mention an incident of biphobia, which was dealt with swiftly, and also some heterosexist presumption:

At the youth programmes I've staffed.... kids have made objectifying comments about bi young women ... I feel like the staff people addressed it pretty directly... People are assumed to be straight unless proven otherwise, particularly if they're in a different gender couple.

Carrie, while stating she 'definitely' felt supported as a bisexual Quaker at her local meeting, did feel that bisexuality was often omitted from discussion. When I asked her had she ever heard bisexuality discussed at a meeting, she replied:

Certainly sexuality. Bisexuality specifically, though? Not that I can remember. There's definitely been lots of discussions about homosexuality, about transgender, but bi has not been singled out. In fact, it's been a little bit kind of just part of the gay thing, but not its own separate stuff. There actually was... just in the last couple of months, an issue of Friends Journal... and it was all about gender and sexuality. I read a couple of the articles, but I don't remember there was one specifically about bisexuality... sexuality and gender for sure, but bisexuality I don't think so, not so much.

Carrie did not report any biphobia against her at a Quaker meeting, commenting: 'Actually I've heard that most from the lesbian community... Not in my meeting or in my Quaker community.' However, it seemed that LGBT affirmation was geographically defined within Quakerism: 'I'm from the most liberal branch, so I think my answer to this would be different if I were living in Kansas... or any of the places in the world where Quakers are concentrated and are not from a liberal branch.'

Carrie noted that while faith, gender and sexuality discussions were ongoing within the Quaker movement, pockets of intolerance still existed:

There's this one branch that has this personnel policy... that anyone who wants to be a pastor or to lead sharing at one of annual gatherings, or a youth leader or anything like that, all these people have to sign this personnel policy. And of the things it says, is they must either be celibate or they will only express their sexuality within the context of a heterosexual marriage.

Meanwhile, Toni left the Episcopal Church she had grown up in following an adverse reaction to her same sex marriage: 'I pretty much felt like I got chased out of the Episcopal Church because of my same sex marriage and also as an activist in the same sex Marriage Equality [campaign].'

Toni recounted how the church seemed to hold her personally responsible for the controversial swearing in of the Bishop of New Hampshire, openly gay Gene Robinson:

It was about 2003/2004 ... and our church was talking a lot about him, Bishop Robinson. And they were talking about him and looking at me, like it was all my fault or something. They were saying it was going to split the church, it was going to divide the church.

Toni and her bisexual wife experienced biphobia within the Marriage Equality movement in the US, too:

... inside the Marriage Equality movement, we were both out as being bisexual and the gay and lesbian leadership wanted nothing to do with that. So we were being pushed away by the so-called LGBT groups, who were really gay and lesbian groups. They were

pushing us away because we were bisexual and our community was pushing us away because we were in a same sex marriage.

This rejection from both the secular and spiritual community saw Toni leave the Episcopal Church:

I really needed the support of a church, which is why I did not just leave, I literally walked down the street to the Unitarian Universalist Church a block away and joined. I was like, I need a spiritual community; I need a church that's going to support me... everybody is talking about racism in our church the whole time. And when marriage equality was such an issue, they were constantly talking about same sex couples... more than 50% of the LGBT population is bisexual and people think we don't even exist... It's scary to be the one who's out there and getting kicked out of your church, being on the front page... I mean, I've bought a house in a rural community so that I could raise my family and I thought this would be wonderful. And I go there and I'm out and I'm part of my church and we ended up having to leave and move away and leave our house because our community didn't accept us.

Like others in this study, the only time Toni had ever heard a mention of bisexuality in church was when she herself presented on the subject to a local Metropolitan Community Church. However, it does seem that the Unitarian Universalist Church is open to her speaking about bisexuality as a lay person in the near future.

In terms of affirming churches, I interviewed Jain, an IT worker from Texas, who attended a large LGBT affirming branch of the United Church of Christ. Whilst Jain rated the current pastor, she did not feel that the church had traditionally catered for bisexual people: 'I think here bisexuality is seen as someone who can't decide, in this community here, so the church.' Jain stated that bisexuality was not mentioned at all among congregants. From the front: 'They say who you love is ok, but you know they're talking about LGTIA but no Bs.'

I asked her whom the church served and she replied: 'T a little bit. LGBT is just kind of always thrown in there. The lesbians want it to be LGBT, the gays want it to be LGBT but you never hear the bi people going, well can it be BLGT?'

It was not clear, however, whether there were any bisexual congregants to speak up for bisexual people aside from Jain, who by her own admission, was not often at main services. While a number of threesomes existed in the church, these appeared to be same sex throuples. In terms of bvisibility, Jain commented that there was no mention of bisexuality on the church website and that the church bookstore was dominated by books on 'gay guys.' She expressed a concern for the youth, with whom she had some involvement:

I don't think we have bisexual role models anywhere. Like I worry a lot about the kids. I work with the youth a lot... it's very popular in high school to be bi right now. Bi is the in thing, because it lets you be gay without really being gay – so my niece tells me.'

Laurie, also United Church of Christ, stated she had not heard anyone speak of bisexuality at her church either. Like other participants, she had only heard bisexuality spoken of at the Gay Christian Network conference, and again, at a presentation led by herself and other bisexual Christians.

However, Gabriela from California seemed to have found a genuinely bi-affirming branch of the United Church of Christ, which also held services in her native Spanish: 'It's been extremely healing and wonderful being in community with not only other LGBTQ Christians, but Latinx and being able to speak in Spanish. I know spaces like these are incredibly rare, so I'm thankful I found it.'

She also made some revealing comments about her experiences within both the evangelical church and LGBT affirming communities:

I left my prior church because of their anti-LGBT rhetoric. They said they were 'welcoming' but by no means were they affirming. I found that 'progressive' evangelical spaces pull the 'bait and switch' on many LGBT people. They are seemingly cool and accepting, but when it comes to matters of leadership, theology or full membership – they are just as closed minded and bigoted as the fundamentalists they so often distance themselves from. I would like to see bisexuality said in the same breath as gay, lesbian, and trans. I think most affirming churches and 'LGBT' organizations/programs are actually only affirming of gay men and lesbian women. There's been some great work done with trans\*visibility as of late and that's great to see. I wish bi erasure wasn't so prevalent in these spaces.

Meredith, however, whilst agreeing that bisexual erasure certainly existed within the PCUSA Church she attended, was not unduly bothered by this, perhaps owing to experience and maturity:

I certainly agree that it's there. It's sort of what I've encountered at my church... but I don't feel personally hurt by it, to tell you the truth. I don't feel some particular expectation that other people have to be acutely aware or sensitive to my being bisexual, or people in the community being bisexual. I don't carry that sensitivity around.

### **12.3 Polyamory**

As discussed in Chapter 10, there is some contentiousness in discussing polyamory and bisexuality as the former is often perceived to tar the reputation of bisexual people. Such sentiments were expressed by Gabriela:

I'm not sure why this is a subject that so often comes up with bisexuality. This is frustrating and a cliché, since one doesn't have to be bisexual to be polyamorous. As a matter of fact, most polyamorous people I know are either gay or lesbian (not bisexual). Again, there is absolutely nothing wrong with being polyamorous, but spoken in the same breath as bisexuality lends to the cliché that bi people are always cheating or looking for more partners, because we can't be satisfied with one.

However, as a number of individuals within this research cell practised polyamory, it felt appropriate to discuss attitudes towards non-monogamy with participants.

In general, there was a correlation between the churchmanship of participants and their attitude towards polyamory. For example, those from strict conservative Christian traditions such as Seventh-day Adventists and the Presbyterian Church of America (PCA), were far less inclined to approve of non-monogamy, whereas those from more liberal traditions, such as United Church of Christ and the Quakers, were generally accepting.

Su, who attended a PCA church, could see biblical precedence for non-monogamy but still felt that marriage should be monogamous: 'I believe that God's ordination for marriage, for sex, is like one to one, is monogamous.' In her view, just as heterosexual people may find other members of the opposite sex attractive, being bisexual was no justification for non-monogamy. For Su, marriage was to the opposite sex and was for life: 'Because I've made a commitment in marriage to one man, I'm going to be with that man.'

Another PCA participant, Jennifer, was unambiguous in her view: 'I think it's not the way God intended relationships to be, even if everyone's okay with it.'

Sammi, also PCA, was a little more open to the idea, again citing biblical precedence.

It was clear that there was polyamory in the church because the elders were told to only take one wife. But that was for elders. I have mixed feelings. My partner and I have talked about it. We're not sure. Right now we're very happy, very satisfied with each other. I think of myself as monogamous... But we've talked about it possibly in the future.

But it was clear that Sammi experienced a disconnect and disembodiment between what she felt she ought to believe, and how she really felt outside of the church:



At this point, I would tend to say that if you identify as a Christian, then you have to support monogamy. But as a regular person, I don't think there's anything wrong with polyamory. I kind of have a split between what a Christian should do and what like everyone should do.

Cheryl, who was non-denominational at present but grew up Baptist, felt it was impractical more than unethical: 'Personally, I definitely believe in monogamy, having one person in the relationship with you. I've never been a fan of having multiple relationships, cos I just view that as messy... because you're dealing with multiple people. Definitely monogamous.'

Meredith of the more liberal PCUSA church, lay great store by fidelity:

I feel very strongly that the vows of fidelity – and it's part of my understanding of God and who we are in the image of God – that fidelity is a very important human experience to have. It's central to maturity somehow for me. Adhering to those vows trumps every other thing. So I take it from that angle of fidelity. It simply rules out... polyamory for me.

Des, an Episcopalian, shared Meredith's views:

I've made vows to my wife that she will be my partner for life, that, you know, as far as relationships go, you know, she's it... I think there's something about giving yourself to one person and fully giving yourself to that person. And that's actually where I get the confidence to be fully honest with her... the notion that we both made vows that we would be fully present for each other and fully supportive.

Dani, a Catholic, had no issue with polyamory but felt it was a difficult balancing act: '[I] have often wondered whether I'd be able to handle it myself. I think it's definitely meant for a select group of people who can handle the demands of having multiple partners with extensive communication.'

Others were conflicted. Luis, who attended a large evangelical mega church, admitted:

That's something that personally I'm a little bit conflicted about right now. Because from a religious standpoint, I believe [I should be] monogamous.... But were I to come to my wife, and she said, 'okay, this is far from ideal, do you need to have a boyfriend of some kind, I think I would probably accept that, even though my Christian views would go against it.

Freda, a Seventh-day Adventist, was also undecided:

I know that my husband would not be on board with that. I know that monogamy is extremely important to him. I honestly don't know... basically if I didn't have a partner or spouse that monogamy was super important to, I don't know what my response to that would be... I've never considered myself monogamous... I know for some people, that's the ticket; that's what makes them the happiest.

Martha was also unsure: 'I haven't really examined that... I would want to be accepting of people.'

Bix, a former Pentecostal, took a liberal view:

My husband and I have been monogamous and will most likely continue to be so. But we've discussed the pros and cons of pursuing polyamory and if it's right for us. Just the discussions themselves have brought us closer together.

Dee, a single member of more liberal PCUSA denomination, could not imagine being monogamous:

It's hard for me to imagine being married to a person – any gender – for the rest of my life and never having in the rest of that time sex with someone else of a different gender, or different sex. I think to a certain extent, my sexual satisfaction kind of craves both. It's less about needing multiple partners... I see it much more likely that I would have a partner and we would be open to introducing a third partner, or going off and doing our own thing, but always negotiated, agreed upon.

Jason, who no longer considered himself Christian, currently had three partners and described himself as 'ethically non-monogamous.' For Jason, the bisexual disposition organically led one to challenge existing structures, including relationship models:

Being bi, you're already in a space where you're questioning implicit systemic assumptions about how things are supposed to go, you know, the format of relationships and the trajectory and purpose of dating and relating and all that crucial human business... You're more suspect of implicit ideas, just these boiler plate kind of one size fits all clothing for how things are supposed to be. I've realised that I've always felt not particularly monogamous but I've always been into relationships and the idea of my partners having other partners is actually really good for me and gives a really good synergy.

Eira, a Quaker, also spoke of the spiritual energy released by not conforming to monosexual relationship configurations and how Quakerism linked in to this.

Personally, polyamory's been an important part of my faith journey. Quakerism became more important in my life around the same time as I started thinking about non-monogamy and then exploring it. There are some connections in my spiritual life. Quakerism has a tradition of, a distrust of form and rituals and sort of allowing yourself to be attentive to where you're being led.

Eira felt that the lack of rigidity within Quakerism enabled them to avoid shoehorning interpersonal relationships into 'pre-existing forms but could explore what they each meant with the other people involved.' However, Quakers were not uniformly approving of polyamory: 'I think there would be a spectrum of opinions in the Quaker community like there

is about everything... I have had enough one on one conversations to know that it would be controversial for many Quakers.'

Carrie, another Quaker, previously identified as poly, but was now focused on her primary relationship with her husband:

I'm not judging other people who have multiple relationships at a time, but for me... my primary partner is so important to me and is such a big priority in my life, and I have so many other things that are such big priorities in my life, my work and my faith and my activism, I don't really have time for another relationship.

Toni, a Unitarian Universalist, had previously been a member of the polyamorous community, but now practised monogamy:

I consider myself to be a polyamorous person at heart. I believe that it is ethical to have honest, open relationships with more than one person. My wife and I have, however, decided ten years ago that it was too much work and too much stress for our family. So we have been monogamous for the last ten years of our twelve year marriage. But not because we believe it's unethical to be non-monogamous, as long as your non-monogamous in an honest, open, ethical way, which is not being secretive and hiding, and not treating our primary partner or any of your partners badly, or other people for that matter.

Jain of the United Church of Christ, similarly had no issue with polyamory but felt it was too much effort:

I don't think I could do it. It's a lot of work... I think as long as it's legal and doesn't hurt anybody else and you agree to it... I always tell everyone, no animals, no children, no poop. Everything else is up for exploration!

Gabriela, also United Church of Christ, commented:

I think it's fine for people that it works for. It doesn't work for me, though. I am in a monogamous marriage. But I don't judge anyone for whatever kind of consensual relationship works best for them and their partner(s).

Laurie, another United Church of Christ participant, remarked: 'I've had exposure to it through friends who are poly and who perform their relationships in ethical and healthy ways.'

Jay, another who no longer attended church, was not polyamorous himself, but had no issue with those who were: 'It is not for me, but if all parties are consenting and willing, then I am not going to stand in their way.'

Catherine, a priest from the more liberal Presbyterian Church USA, commented: 'I'm not interested in participating in a polyamorous relationship for myself. However, I do think it can

be ethical/lifegiving/enriching for some people. I'm comfortable with diversity in how people partner and structure their most intimate family relationships.'

Amy, a childhood Southern Baptist but now non-denominational, also took an affirming position:

I think that love is beautiful in many forms. I think that the point of Christianity is to foster and grow love in many places and for some people, polyamory means more love, and for some people, it doesn't. I'm not in the place to bring judgement to anyone else.

## **12.4 Self-image**

I asked all participants to explain what they believed to be the positive and negative aspects of living as a bisexual Christian. Again, as in Research Cell 2, *Bisexual Christians in the UK*, it was notable that the negative factors vastly outweighed the positive.

### **12.4.1 Positive aspects of bisexuality**

Jason felt being bisexual gave him a great deal more insight into people's lives than his monosexual peers:

I feel like I have a lot of empathy and I can relate to so many people, because if someone tells me about their date with a woman or their date with a man... I just can kind of vibe with a lot of people... Being able to relate to a lot of people's framework of reference for dating and attraction is neat for me. I feel like it's a little secret power, like I'm walking among the straight world and the gay world and I've got what they're going through, at least a little bit.

Freda responded: '... there's must more beautiful people in the world to appreciate!'

Elizabeth expressed a sense of contentment in her bisexual orientation and the bisexual community:

What I love about being bisexual is it's such a natural part of my life, that I've always embraced it. I've always felt really good about it. I've never felt internally ashamed about it, which is good... I never really like, oh, I wish I was straight or I wish I was gay. I definitely feel a lot like- I don't know if it's necessarily pride – but it feels like a natural part of me and my life and I enjoy that. And another thing that I enjoy about being bi is the community.

Elizabeth particularly valued the community she had found in bisexual activism worked, though expressed regret that the same sense of community was not available in a church setting:

I've made friends, a whole new community, and I've been able to contribute back to the community. It makes me feel much more whole. I think it's just that last lingering piece... I have all these connecting pieces and church is still like this big X.

Eira expressed similar sentiments: 'I think being part of the LGBT community in general ... is a source of support to me. I feel like I'm part of a community or part of a group that's making the world better.'

Amy enjoyed the radical, political and complex aspects of bisexuality:

There's something about bisexuality that is radical. There's something about the bisexual identity that undermines society's expectations of sexuality. I don't like my sexuality to be represented as neat or tidy, because it's not and I don't think sexuality is tidy. Sexuality is messy and sexuality is complicated and our identities are complicated.

#### **12.4.2 Negative aspects of bisexuality**

It was depressing again to note that the negative aspects of bisexuality dominated discussion. However, it is perhaps necessary to clarify that it was not an ontological dissatisfaction with being bisexual that was expressed, but rather at how bisexuality was perceived by others and the effects of such perceptions on bisexual individuals.

Su spoke of the conflicting feelings she experienced as a bisexual person in the queer community, feeling simultaneously privileged and oppressed: 'I get to benefit from all these privileges; at the same time, I still identify and I still get oppressed.' She had resolved to speak out for bisexual rights, even if she did end up marrying a same sex partner.

Martha, who had a straight husband, agreed with this erasure of bisexuality as an option in people's eyes: 'I feel like everybody will assume that I'm straight because who I'm with...if I were with a woman, everyone would assume that I'm a lesbian, and I'm not bisexual also. I do sort of feel those assumptions.'

Gabriela made similar points to Martha:

As a highly femme presenting cis woman married to a cis man, I find that I have to consistently come out and that's exhausting. I think I'm shoved into a role as ally and that's frustrating. I haven't always felt like I had a seat at the LGBT table and have witnessed a lot of biphobia and erasure... I do not find it difficult to be a bisexual Christian. I find it much more difficult to be bisexual in LGBT spaces.

Dee also commented along similar lines:

If I show up to church with my girlfriend, nobody knows that I'm bi. All they know is that I date women, which means they're going to think that I'm a lesbian. If I show up with my boyfriend, then they will assume that I am straight, even if I try to present in an overtly queer way... it's also not in front of people, unless you're saying it all the time, unless you're like constantly saying, 'as a bisexual, blah blah blah.'

The whole experience of bi erasure was summed up by Dee as 'just crap.'

Elmo spoke of the double repression bisexual Christians suffered: 'LGBT people of no faith accept my sexuality identity then reject my Christian identity and very vehemently so. It's a very complicated thing within the LGBT Christian community. A lot of the gay individuals don't understand my sexuality.'

Sammi spoke of the assumptions within the LGBT faith community that she was polyamorous or adulterous.

This frustration was shared by Meredith:

My whole time of being out as bisexual in my community, here where I live, has been as a married person for years and years. So I feel that has protected me in some way. Nevertheless, within that, I would say that the most difficult thing is when I encounter the other presumption on the part of someone else that I'm an adulterous sinner who has violated the Ten Commandments.

Sammi also spoke of a sense of feeling 'locked out' as her sexual identity was not visible to others, being married to an opposite sex partner. This caused heterosexual people to make hurtful comments about LGBT people in her presence. A number of closeted participants mentioned third party insults about bisexual people overheard in their presence within church circles. Des noted: '

I can pass perfectly fine as a cisgender heterosexual guy, so people in conversations have no reason... to edit themselves. I've been part of many conversations, even with gay men, who who've said things like, 'I don't think that's a real thing.'

For Laurie, attitudes among conservative Christians in the US mirrored those of the Church of England in the UK, as published in *Issues in Human Sexuality* (Church of England, 1991):

My identity doesn't seem to exist for a lot of people. For conservative Christians, especially in the US, the attitude seems to be, 'well, you can still choose to enact hetero relationships, so you're fine as long as you don't act on your attraction to the

same sex' - which is a total misunderstanding of the nature of my identity and what it means for me as a person.

For Cheryl, it was the ignorance and complacency of non-bisexual people that irritated her: 'They don't take the time to learn about the topic or about people who are bisexual. They don't take the time to question... they take the stereotypes as they are.' For Cheryl, the top three things that were difficult about being bisexual was this lack of empathy coupled with a lack of education, alongside the sheer difficulty of finding someone to be relationship with.

Jason also felt ignorance and presumptions were rife:

The difficulties are people's immediate non-verbal emotional reaction. If you say that you're bi, even if they steal themselves and you see them activating their intellectual side... there's sort of thing that crosses their face. There's a quizzical look... I'm just tired of it and you have to sort of gird yourself to educate people. So people's assumptions. One of the problems is, when people excited about it, then say that's great and so progressive, I really understand LGBT stuff, it's really cool that you're bi, but in the same breath have one of the many misconceptions about bisexuality. So I always take it with a pinch of salt when people say they're progressive and they get it.

Jason did not like the sensation of 'being a curiosity' and spoke of the tension of being simultaneously invisible and hyper-visible:

There's invisibility issues, but there's also... hypervisibility, which is when people see you or see this caricature of you and they end up not seeing you. So it's like you're behind this sort of construct that they create and they can't see you. But they're absolutely white hot spotlight looking at you with all these misconceptions, so it's like a kind of version of invisibility that some people are calling hypervisibility. In the same breath it negates you entirely while looking right at you as a target.

Elizabeth also touched on this 'goldfish bowl' sensation:

You always wonder what your employer is going to think; you're always thinking about what your pastor is going to think; you always wonder what your parents are going to think. It's always a constant, not just in church but in life in general, a wondering of how is this person going to react? Are they going to say something biphobic? Are they going to raise an eyebrow?... maybe they don't say something outright, but they say *okaayyyyyy*... sometimes it drives me a little crazy, thinking about it... Trying to figure out people, where they're coming from, constantly feeling like, am I being judged, am I being discriminated against? Am I being marginalised? What's going on?

Melissa listed four key difficulties for her as a bisexual Christian. These were the 'moral dilemma' surrounding bisexuality and the clobber verses in Scripture; the 'stigma that you can't be queer and Christian at the same time;' judgement, disapproval and lack of support from other Christians, and the disapproval of her 'choice' by family members.

Catherine listed conflation of bisexuality with lesbian or gay experiences, as well as bi-invisibility within the church, referring to a 'sheer lack of conversation,' resulting in social and spiritual isolation.

Many lesbian/gay folks have a certain level of empathy, because they have also had a coming out experience. And this is both a blessing and a curse. Empathy is a blessing, but it can be a curse when lesbian/gay folks mistakenly assume that bisexual individuals need the same types of support/encouragement/resources that they did. Or when they further fail to realise that bisexuality is actually a distinct identity set apart from lesbian/gay experience that brings a distinct set of experiences with it and a distinct and different set of needs.

Eira also touched on feeling 'alien or marginalised' due to the omission of bisexual role models in popular culture. They spoke of being 'reticent to talk about my life too much or get too close.'

Martha also spoke of the omission of bisexual identities from the LGBT debate within churches:

They don't really mention bisexuality and the whole narrative is... either your sexual orientation is a choice and therefore you can say it's a sin, or it's fully not a choice to be with somebody of the same sex, therefore we can't say it's a sin. Those are sort of the two sides that are presented. Of course, bisexuality is not a choice either. It is sort of a little bit different than you have no ability to be attracted to somebody of the opposite sex, which is the only narrative that is presented by Christian LGBT apologetics that I've seen.

Martha gave the example of Ken Wilson's 'A Pastor's Letter to his Congregation' (2014) in which lesbian, gay and transgender identities are consistently mentioned, but no bisexuality. In her view, bisexuality had deliberately been omitted, in case 'it might be perceived as damaging the argument.'

Elizabeth spoke of the health disparities for bisexual people, believing that 'a lot of the bisexual erasure has really impacted our health.' The complications of being bisexual had often threatened to frighten Elizabeth 'back into closet' but she was determined to campaign for bisexual rights.

It was particularly difficult within the church:

I think I've found a pretty good church in my area, and yet I still have that fear when I go there, what they ask me, you know, about my life?... I've been bisexual, openly bisexual, long enough to know that no everybody is open and affirming to bisexuality... I think it would be easier for me to walk into that space and say, 'I'm a lesbian, I'm a



queer woman,' and have them be, 'that's great, you know, bring your girlfriend or your wife to our potluck,' than I'm bisexual and my partner's gender can be different.

For Amy, the lack of legitimacy given to women's sexuality added a second layer of illegitimacy specific to the experience of bisexual women:

... if a guy expressed interest in having sex with men, then he would suddenly be gay. It's just gay. But with women, you're just having fun, you're just showing off for men, like there's such a de-legitimisation of women on women sexuality. And so I think that speaks volumes also about bisexuality as well. Because in both of those scenarios, a man doesn't get a chance to be bisexual because as soon as he has an experience with a man, he's gay, and for a woman, a woman doesn't get a chance to be bisexual because her sexuality is not legitimate if it's with another woman.

Amy spoke honestly of how she used to feel identifying as bisexual undermined the authenticity of her same sex attraction:

I wanted to prove to the world that my same sex attraction was real, and bisexuality seemed to undermine that. Like it seemed to be an insult when people asked me if I was bisexual? Because it was, 'aren't you just bisexual' and I was like, 'no, I'm gay!'

Jain also touched on this perception that bisexuality is an elusive identity:

... a lot of people waiver in and out of bisexuality... I'm committed to likes boobs and penis, whatever, as long as I like the person. But I think that nobody ever dips into lesbianism or dips into homosexuality. But they do dip into bisexuality, so it's seen as like an amorphous thing, not a solid community like gays and lesbians.

She spoke of the common misperception that bisexual people are 'just wishy-washy, we just can't decide' and remarked with irony: 'Like my whole life, people have regarded me gay or straight. Well, currently I'm a practising straight or a practising lesbian because I tend to fall in love with a person.'

Toni referred to the 'slippery slope argument' that caused church organisations to erase bisexuality. As discussed in Chapter 10, many churches did not wish to align themselves with bisexual people for fear of being tarred by the polyamorous brush. In addition, Toni felt that US religious prudery around sexual matters meant the word 'bisexual' was often deemed inappropriate to be seen in print. Referring to an article that appeared about her family, Toni recalled: 'I kept correcting her and saying it was not okay to refer to us as lesbians, because we are not lesbian... but they didn't want to use the word bisexual, because it had the word sex in it.' This overt prudery appeared to be a particularly American phenomenon.

## **12.5 The Future**

I asked all participants what they would like to see improved in the church to make it a more affirming environment for bisexual Christians.

Su felt that there needed to be less rigidity around concepts of gender and sexuality:

I think that in Christian culture, gender identity is irrevocably tied to sexual identity. Because of that, people tend to perceive things as monolithic, like monosexuality. There's no framework for understanding anything fluid, like sexual fluidity. People have this rigidity about what it means to be a man, what it means to be a woman.

For Sammi, the lack of attention and credence given to bisexuality was the obstacle to progress:

At this point, erasure is the big problem. People don't know we exist. And then if they know we exist, they don't know what bisexuality means... we haven't been able to get past explaining what it means to be bisexual; we haven't even got past that hurdle... so to me, that's a huge problem. Every time some declares that he had same sex attraction, but now he's cured, it's likely that he was bisexual. It's not that he's no longer gay; it's just bisexual.

The complacency around bisexual rights needed addressing, in Sammi's view: 'Some people just feel like we sit under the umbrella of lesbian and gay and if we get lesbian and gay rights, then bisexual rights will just like come along with it, which isn't true.'

Melissa wanted to see a new, more humane approach to LGBT issues in churches:

It would be nice if there were actual discussions about queerness in church services. I often find that most Christians are ignorant of sexuality due to the misconstruction of Bible verses and wrong, hateful teaching on the topic throughout generations.

She highlighted the need for 'an open, non-judgmental discussion' where LGBT people 'could tell others about their struggle and the painful side of their own story,' with the aim that 'maybe more Christians could find sympathy and understand the struggles we face.'

Melissa concluded: 'If there's anything I truly want to be improved in churches, it would be to stop judging people and instead support and love people, just as Jesus did.'

For Dani, affirmation of LGBT people from the pulpit in the Catholic Church would help heal the pain inflicted on the LGBT community by the church, as well as being symbolic of God's inclusivity:

I love to see the Catholic Church open itself up to accepting and celebrating queer relationships of all kinds. I think having more people in leadership roles in the Church that are vocal and loving of LGBT people is crucial, not only to healing the hurt that

Christian groups have wreaked on queer people, but also to actually fulfilling the true meaning of Christianity – which, to me, is that we are called to be stewards of the planet and our fellow people.

For Jason, seeing ‘more examples of myself in the church’ would be a start, It was all too easy to put a rainbow motif on a church logo; what was required was ‘listening harder’ and ‘really straining to understand the issues that we face in the bi community.’ Jason spoke of ‘reaching out more from a place of humility’ than pride, with more openness and effort made to support bisexual people. Jason added: ‘... from the pulpit, I suppose there would be more inclusive language and ... stories and anecdotes in your sermon or homily... to incorporate the full spectrum of life.’

More visibility of bisexual people and resources was repeatedly mentioned.

Catherine felt more bi-specific outreach was required: ‘I’d like to see sermons, bible studies, workshops that specifically address bisexuality and where bisexual people of faith are invited to lead these times of education and outreach.’

Bix said similarly: ‘While we are at an affirming church, I would love to see space for more open discussion or small groups regarding sexuality.’

Others, such as Elizabeth, highlighted the need for bisexual resources as well as increased visibility:

I would like more representation. I would like to have a more inclusive church to go to, where you know, they even just have bi literature out or bi books... Some churches they do book clubs and a couple of them actually have done bi book readings. I would love to see things like that.

Toni spoke of the lack of community among bisexual people at her affirming Unitarian Universalist church, owing to the silence on bisexuality:

I would love to see it actually specifically talked about. I would love it if there were a sermon that was on bisexuality. I would love it if there was a workshop. I would love it if there was a pamphlet. I would love just to see us, to see myself represented in the church. I know there are other out and active bisexual people at my church... but it’s not like it’s ever talked about... we don’t really get an opportunity, it’s not really part of the conversation.

Laurie responded: ‘Acknowledgement, plain and simple. Acknowledgement that our identity exists and is valid and is a major part of who we are as people and that sexuality isn’t as simple and straightforward as a lot of people have thought.’

Jain offered a more quirky appraisal of both the bisexual and racial situation in the United States: 'I think everyone will be bi eventually, like everyone will be brown. In 200, 300 years, we'll all be brown and we'll all be bi.'

## **12.6 Conclusion**

It was clear that bisexual Christians in the US faced many similar issues to their counterparts in the UK, citing erasure and stigmatisation of their identity as key stressors, exacerbated by the current focus on same sex marriage and transgender rights.

Some key differences did emerge from this data set, however. It was clear that the USA was a more religious society, with church appearing to play a far more central and public role in childhood and adolescent experiences in the US than in the UK. It was also noticeable that participants in this study came to sexual maturity far later than in the UK, with some of those interviewed having had zero or just one relationship, despite being in their early twenties. Participants also appeared to have honed a more definitive coming out narrative than their UK counterparts. This could, of course, be due to the activist status of several of those resourced via social media platforms.

In general, I found US participants spoke for longer and provided more detail than their UK counterparts. This can be partially explained by the need to organise set times for these interviews in advance, allowing for time zones, which meant participants were prepared well in advance and had their story ready, whereas some UK interviews were done hastily in lunch-hours, in cafes and parks, on a more ad-hoc basis, owing to the ease of calling back another time if need be. Again, women spoke for longer than their male peers. This could simply be, of course, that the women interviewed were a particularly talkative sample, or more likely, served as evidence of less shame in general surrounding same-sex attraction, which would tie in with Michael Salas' theory from Chapters 9 and 10.

Extreme fundamentalism was also more visible in the US interviews, with several harrowing stories of what can only be described as parental abuse of vulnerable young adults in the name of Christianity.

## CHAPTER 13

### Discussion and Concluding Thoughts

In the introduction to this study, *Bisexual Christians and Mental Health: Why the Church Needs to be More Welcoming*, I stated that my aim in this research was to find a Christian ethic or theology which would enable bisexual people of faith to live with integrity, inside or outside of the church. The question at the heart of my research was this: is it possible to live holistically as a bisexual Christian?

In 1978, Fritz Klein noted: ‘Bisexuals are sociologically non-existent, invisible in church, society and science (F Klein, 1978).’ My concern was with the former. The title of the study itself signposts the crux of the problem – Christians who identify as bisexual often have mental health issues which are unresolved or exacerbated by church attendance. This hypothesis was arrived at through a study of existing (secular) scholarly works on bisexual well-being or mental health (e.g. Anderson & McCormack, 2016; OU, 2012; Woodhead et al. 2015; Weinberg et al. 1994) and studies of the LGBT faith community and mental health (e.g. Vespone, 2016; Gibbs & Goldbach, 2015; Longo et al. 2012; Wolff & Himes, 2010; Koenig & Larson, 2001). It was underpinned with Meyer’s Minority Stress Theory (2003), which dictates that marginalisation increases, the more intersectional the identity in question.

#### Research Findings

As noted in the introduction to this study, my concern here was on working from the outside in (Anderson & McCormack, 2016) and not the reverse. I was interested not in what made a person bisexual, but rather how bisexual people in this study navigated life as a Christian with multi gendered attraction - either inside or outside of faith communities - the decisions they made and the impact of prevailing cultures on these choices.

From an auto-ethnographic perspective (Chang, 2016), it had already become apparent to me from personal experience that the established church in the UK, the Church of England, was largely unable to encompass bisexual people within its fold. I was interested to see if this was

true of other denominations in the UK. Did all bisexual Christians feel as marginalised as me? From there I set about finding potential solutions to the problem. Were there churches that did welcome and nurture bisexual people, and if so, how did they do it? As I began to investigate alternative church traditions and practices, I began to explore US Christian culture, home to a number of LGBT affirming denominations, and this became an institutional and organisational comparative study. What issues were common to bisexual Christians in the UK and US? What could be learnt from individuals, organisations and churches that had managed to support bisexual people of faith? Which denominations managed to retain their bisexual congregants and how did they achieve that? And was retaining existing members enough in itself, or should more be done to grow the bisexual contingent (and indeed other sexual minorities)?

With a clear sense of what I sought to discover, I then set about the 'how'. Mindful of Lingwood's critique of 'them and us' theology (Lingwood, 2010) – by which Lingwood refers to the tendency of church hierarchies to debate and canonise LGBT issues in exclusively heterosexual spaces - I was determined that the voices of bisexual people themselves should be heard. It was these voices that would be used to shape a new ethic of bisexual inclusion, much in the spirit of liberation theology (Gutierrez, 1974), which uses a bottom-up approach to create theology.

I decided upon a constructivist grounded theory model (Charmaz, 2006), where, based on an existing hypothesis derived from personal experience and minority stress theory, I set about proving that bisexual people are marginalised in the Christian church. If this was the case, how did this happen and what measures could be taken to remedy this exclusion? To achieve this, I devised a four cell research model.

### **Research Cell 1**

Research Cell 1 featured bi-affirming pastors and educators from the UK, sourced from existing contacts and via networking at LGBT faith events nationally. There were fourteen participants in this cell, of which seven were licensed clergy or pastors. Three of those chose to use pseudonyms to protect their identity. Another two participants were psychotherapists who dealt with bisexual clients, one was the CEO of a large LGBT Christian campaigning

organisation, one was heavily involved in LGBT Catholic activism, one was a retreat leader, one was an academic and one was an author and employee of the Church of England (non-clergy).

These interviews were then transcribed and coded line by line in batches, then returned to for more detailed coding (Charmaz, 2006). Transcribing and coding in batches like this enabled me to spot emergent themes, which informed subsequent questions asked at interview. The same process was applied to completed questionnaires. A breakdown of interview methods can be seen in **Table 13.1** below. The average interview in the UK lasted around 40 minutes, though some were as long as 1.5 hours and some as short as 20 minutes (where participants were meeting me in their lunch-hours).

There were no ethnic minorities within this cell, though two were non-UK nationals. Eight participants were female, five participants were male and one identified as gender queer (biologically female). The youngest participant was 41 and the eldest 69, with a mean average age of 56. This was not surprising given the professional seniority of many of those interviewed. Findings from this research cell were presented in Chapter 6: *Bi-affirming Pastors and Educators from the UK*.

It was confirmed by the sample group that bisexual erasure was almost uniformly present in churches and LGBT faith organisations in the United Kingdom. It emerged that there was a distinct lack of attention paid to bisexuality across the board, from verbal and printed media, to pastoral support. This had a detrimental effect on pastors and educators' ability to support bisexual Christians who approached their organisation, either through lack of knowledge or lack of pastoral resources, or indeed both. The woeful absence of bisexuality in clergy training materials was also noted, with particular reference to the Church of England's *Issues in Human Sexuality* (Church of England, 1991), which dedicates just a single paragraph to bisexuality. This did not bode well for the future in terms of improving provision for bisexual Christians via enhanced pastoral awareness.

## **Research Cell 2**

Research Cell 2 featured Bisexual Christians from the UK. Participants were recruited from a range of sources over a six month period, from February to August 2016. A large majority were sourced via Twitter, with several snowball effects occurring. I also made use of existing personal contacts from my locality and place of employment, as well as contacting LGBT

affirming church leaders and faith organisations for potential interviewees. There were twenty-eight participants in this cell in total, of which nineteen identified as female, eight as male and one as gender queer (biologically male). These figures include two transgender individuals, one MTF and one FTM. In terms of ethnicity, all participants bar one were Caucasian, with one participant of Anglo-Indian descent. The youngest respondent was aged 21 and the eldest 62, giving a mean average age of 37.79. Interview methods can be seen under **Table 13.1**.

*Table 13.1 Breakdown of Interview Methods per Research Cell*

Research Cell	Face to Face	Facetime	Skype Video	Skype Audio	Telephone	Questionnaire
1	5	0	2	1	6	0
2	7	0	4	1	11	5
3	11	0	7	0	0	1
4	6	1	6	5	1	7
Total	29	1	19	7	18	14

Their experiences were analysed in Chapters 7 and 8, *Bisexual Christians in the UK* and *Bisexual Christians and Church Life in the UK* respectively, where I considered to what extent bisexual people of faith felt included and upheld by their chosen denomination. Did these findings confirm or contradict the information shared by pastors and educators from Research Cell 1?

In terms of mental health, it was discovered that while bisexual Christians did indeed experience extremely elevated rates of depressive illnesses (89%), the factors behind poor mental health were not necessarily related to the typical dual bisexual stressors of identity erasure and stigmatisation. Family breakdown, school bullying, and pre-existing psychological or mental health conditions also played a role, in some cases, making it difficult to distinguish what precisely were the contributing factors to poor mental health. This also raised the issue of whether bisexual people may be more genetically prone to mental health issues, though a debate on this was deemed beyond the scope of this study.



With regard to specific church experiences (Chapter 8), it was notable that negative church experiences vastly outnumbered positive ones. It was also abundantly clear that both churches and faith organisations of all denominations had little idea of how to handle bisexuality from a teaching or pastoral perspective, with the result that the B in LGBT was all but erased in documentation, sermons and other faith communications. Few saw the church addressing bisexuality in the short-term future, and in this way, findings in Research Cell 2 confirmed the fears and suspicions of pastors and educators in Research Cell 1. Overall, a bleak picture was painted of a faith community steeped in binary thought processes and outmoded socio-cultural practices, particularly the Church of England, which came in for the heaviest criticism by my participants.

### **Research Cell 3**

My intention in Research Cell 3, Bi-affirming Pastors and Educators in the USA, was to cover a broad range of bisexual pastoral practice. I therefore interviewed pastors from most of the major denominations in the USA – where access was granted – as well as leaders of support groups (both Christian and secular), bisexual writers, activists and psychotherapists. As public figures with an existing ministry or practice, all were willing to use their real names to speak about professional practice. However, a small number of those interviewed also identified as bisexual and were reluctant to speak openly of their experiences as bisexual Christians under their own names.

For this reason, I agreed to use this material in Research Cell 4: Bisexual Christians in the USA, giving them pseudonyms in Research Cell 4 to this end. For this reason, I did not state locations, ethnicity or ages of these participants in Research Cell 3, to preserve their anonymity in Research Cell 4 insofar as possible. This seemed preferable to losing valuable material on the bisexual Christian intersection.

To prevent cross-referencing between cells, I have also not disclosed how many participants this affects. In total, 19 were interviewed, including ten female and nine male respondents. Participants included eight clergy, seven activists, two psychotherapists, one academic and one author. Interview methods can be seen under **Table 13.1**. The average interview in the USA was longer than in the UK, approximately around the hour mark. This was because most interviews had to be scheduled owing to time zones and therefore participants tended to be

prepared both in terms of material and the time factor. In the UK, the ease of calling participants back meant that interviews could be done on a less pressurised basis and returned to, if necessary.

Findings from Research Cell 3 were discussed in Chapters 9 and 10: *Bi-Affirming Pastors and Educators in the USA/Bi-Affirming Pastors and Educators in the USA (Pastoral Issues)*. A portrait was painted in this chapter of an erotophobic American church culture, where sex-negativity abounds and sexuality alone is barely discussed, let alone subsets of human sexuality such as bisexuality. Though political developments such as marriage equality and the recent spate of bathroom bills relating to transgender rights were forcing churches to confront issues of gender and sexuality, bisexuality was still almost uniformly ignored or denied credibility, as either a sexual identity or a phenomenon in itself.

Several participants pointed to extreme polarisation of views within American culture in general as a result of binary thought systems, which allowed no space for, or recognition of, intermediate genders or sexualities and alternative relationship configurations. It should be mentioned at this juncture, that the decision to include polyamory within this study was not taken lightly. I was aware both from the literature review and from subsequent additional reading, that some writers and academics saw polyamory at best irrelevant, at worst harmful, to the bisexual debate (e.g. Ross et al. 2010; Rust, 2003); yet there was also a need to explore how dual plus attracted individuals expressed their bisexuality, which could well take in multiple partnerships. In the end, the participants dictated the direction of travel and by virtue of the fact that a number of polyamorous or ex-polyamorous individuals featured in the study ( $n=8$ ), polyamory and attitudes towards non-traditional relationship configurations organically came up in discussion.

#### **Research Cell 4**

Research Cell 4 featured interviews with bisexual Christians in the USA, covering a range of ages and geographical locations. All participants were given pseudonyms of their choice, or selected by myself, where no preference was stated. As with previous research cells, participants were recruited over a six-month period, from February to August 2016. A large majority were sourced via Twitter, with several snowball effects seen. I also contacted LGBT

affirming church leaders, faith organisations and secular support groups that had bisexual clients.

In total, 26 bisexual Christians were interviewed, with 24 currently resident in the USA at the time of interview (the remaining two were on academic postings in the UK at the time). In terms of ethnic diversity, 21 Caucasian, two Latinos, one Hispanic, one African-American and one Taiwanese American were interviewed. Participants came from fourteen states in total, with the most respondents coming from the southern states of Tennessee ( $n=5$ ) and Georgia ( $n=4$ ) and the eastern state of Massachusetts ( $n=3$ ). Both east and west coasts were well covered, with the only significant absence in coverage being the Midwest, with just two states, Ohio and South Dakota, represented. In total, 20 cisgendered females, five cisgendered males and one gender queer (biological male) were interviewed. The youngest participant was aged 18 and the eldest 65, with a mean average of 32, making this a younger research cell than its UK counterpart by nearly six years. This can be explained by the larger number of college students interviewed owing to a snowball effect at a college in Tennessee ( $n=5$ ). In terms of employment, interviewees ranged from clergy, professionals and academics, to musicians, entertainers, activists and students (see **Table 11.1** for a full breakdown). Interview methods can be seen under **Table 13.1**.

Findings from Research Cell 4 were spread over Chapters 11 and 12, *Bisexual Christians in the USA* and *Bisexual Christians and the Church in the USA* respectively. It was clear that this cohort faced many similar issues to their counterparts in Research Cell 2: *Bisexual Christians in the UK*. Erasure and stigmatisation of their bisexual orientation were key stressors, exacerbated by the current focus on same sex marriage and transgender rights. However, as with the UK, it was too simplistic to assume that these key stressors were solely to blame for adverse mental health in bisexual Christians. A number of those interviewed were victims of childhood sexual abuse ( $n=4$ ) and as with the UK sample, several reported other psychological or autistic spectrum disorders which impacted on mental health as well (though it was deemed beyond the scope of this study to investigate this further).

It would thus be disingenuous to claim that biphobia and marginalisation alone accounted for these elevated mental health statistics (by way of comparison, one in four people in the UK

currently suffers from a depressive illness<sup>141</sup> and one in five in the US<sup>142</sup>). It was clear from both bisexual Christian research groups that a number of factors came into play, and it was interesting that autistic spectrum disorders featured in both samples (UK  $n=2$ ; US  $n=2$ ), in both cases well above the national average of 1%<sup>143</sup> and 1.46%<sup>144</sup> respectively. Also notable was the revelation that four participants in the US Bisexual Christian cell were victims of childhood sexual abuse. However, a scholarly exploration of links between bisexuality and sexual abuse was deemed beyond the scope of this study.

It should also be taken into account that many causational factors behind poor bisexual mental health were not specific to bisexuality. For example, the male shame relating to same-sex attraction discussed by therapist Michael Salas in Chapter 10 is common to homosexual men, too, while the lack of credibility afforded female sexualities applies equally to lesbian and heterosexual women. (Blumstein & Schwartz discuss and confirm such male/female attitudes to bisexuality in M. Storr, 2013). These distinctions are important, to avoid giving misleading information on bisexual mental health for political ends, and I was particularly careful as a bisexual researcher myself, not to 'sensationalise' the data for publicity's sake or personal academic gain, even at a subconscious level. This was where detailed questioning, clarification and reflective memos proved particularly helpful.

It was clear from this data set that the USA was a more religious society than the UK, with church appearing to play a far more central and public role in childhood and adolescent experiences in the US than in the UK (See also Pew, 2012). It was also noticeable that participants in this study came to sexual maturity far later than in the UK, delaying the period of conflict within families or churches often until the late teens or early twenties. This potentially had a significant effect on sexual and emotional maturity. This is outlined in Chapters 11 and 12.

Examples of extreme fundamentalism were perhaps unsurprisingly more evident in the US. Interviews, with several harrowing accounts of what can only be described as, at best, extreme

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<sup>141</sup> Source: Mental Health Foundation, 'Fundamental Facts About Mental Health, 2015.' See <http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/fundamental-facts-15.pdf>

<sup>142</sup> Source: Mental Health America, see <http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/issues/state-mental-health-america>

<sup>143</sup> Source: <http://www.autism.org.uk/about/what-is/myths-facts-stats.aspx>

<sup>144</sup> <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2016/03/160331154247.htm>

proselytization, and at worst, parental or clerical abuse of vulnerable young adults in the name of Christianity, were detailed. These accounts were particularly shocking to me, as a researcher, parent and Christian, and I had to take a step back at one point from interviewing, as I became aware of the emotional impact these interactions were having on me. This was where reflective practice came into play. I recognised that these participants were touching on a raw nerve for me, and that this might colour my interpretation of their accounts. I therefore took a break from interviewing at this point and focused on another element of my research, returning to the interviewing process when I felt more distant from the material.

In terms of relationship configurations, it was noticeable that those American participants who identified as polyamorous had been able to remain in the church, whilst those in the UK had left the church or chosen monogamy instead. This could well be accounted for by the more diverse range of affirming denominations in the US than in the comparatively smaller UK church 'market,' with the Metropolitan Community Church, the United Church of Christ, the Unitarian Universalists, the Presbyterian Church USA, the Quakers, and a significant number of Episcopal churches all offering support to LGBT Christians (though admittedly, acceptance of polyamorous practices does vary), while in the UK, only the Metropolitan Community Church and certain isolated independent or 'maverick' mainstream churches offer visible support to minority sexualities.

It was noticeable in the US that those denominations that allowed for sexual autonomy managed to retain their bisexual contingent. 'Out' bisexual Christians were presently worshipping within the United Church of Christ, the Metropolitan Community Church, the Unitarian Universalist Church, The Presbyterian Church USA and in Quaker meetings. Those US bisexual people I interviewed who were not (bi)sexually active, or out as bisexual, were generally members of evangelical (so-called 'non-denominational') congregations, the stricter Presbyterian Church of America and the Catholic Church.

Bisexual Christians were denominationally more widely distributed in the UK, though only the Metropolitan Community Church, Liberty Church and a handful of Anglican churches actively welcomed bisexual members.

### **Theoretical Analysis**

In my final interview of the final research cell, Professor Lisa Diamond of Utah University, a specialist in bisexuality and the psychology of relationships, commented:

I've never seen a study that's broken that down that intersection between faith and bisexuality. I think that's why what you're doing is really important, that we need more discussion of this topic. I think there's been a real sort of inattention to the specific challenges ... I think that this notion 'Oh well, then you should be able to conform to all the strictures of your faith' is a very unique and very damaging type of social pressure and we haven't been dealing seriously with it.

Interviews with participants in the UK and US confirmed existing published findings on the lived experiences of bisexual people (e.g. Ochs & Rowley, 2009; Kolodny, 2000; Hutchins, 1999) in numerous ways. In response to Lisa Diamond's observations, the specific challenges of bisexuality were clearly conveyed by those carrying that intersectional identity, and there had clearly been inattention paid to these challenges on the part of pastors, churches and other faith organisations and communities. Conforming with the strictures of the faith as laid out in doctrinal statements, liturgies and biblical hermeneutics was rarely achievable in a way that supported the psychological wellbeing of participants.

To use an appropriate theological thematic, sins of omission and commission were consistently directed at bisexual congregants from both sides of the Atlantic. Bisexual erasure (omission) was demonstrated in the lack of awareness of, and resources dedicated to, bisexual people of faith, while sins of commission (intentional stigmatisation), though perhaps less frequent, were nevertheless present in the way certain individuals were forced out of the church on disclosing their bisexuality, or made to feel that their sexual orientation was linked to promiscuity and adultery. To adapt a quote from Anderson & McCormack (2016): 'The prejudice and stigma associated with bisexuality is compounded by the lack of *theological* research into bisexuality as a unique sexual identity.'<sup>145</sup>

Not only were church leaders ignorant of bisexuality, but mandatory training materials for ordinands (those training for ministry) either refused to acknowledge bisexuality as a bona fide sexual orientation, or, in the case of the Church of England (1991), discounted it entirely as a valid moral choice. Little more justice was done to bisexuality in works of applied theology either, with it possible to count on the fingers of one hand how many theological works exist

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<sup>145</sup> 2016, p.57, actual quote says 'academic research' for 'theological research.'

that tackle bisexuality head on (Alford-Harkey & Haffner, 2014; Robinson in Thatcher, 2014; Toft, 2011; Toft & Hunt, 2009).

Self-erasure was also present, though mainly on the part of participants from less accepting church cultures. This was unsurprising, particularly in the United States, with the strong, though often erroneous, associations between bisexuality and immorality. For many participants, it was simply less stressful to remain in the closet or exercise their heterosexual privilege, than contend with the ‘revolving closet door’ mentioned by Julia Kenfield and Michael Monroe of the Bisexual Resource Centre, or the disparaging remarks of others. It was certainly true from the evidence of this study that, ‘having to lie, to conceal and not be completely what one is – even with close friends’ was ‘a black cloud hanging over the heads of many bisexuals (F Klein 1993: 125).’

The binary thinking that is endemic in most mainstream denominations was cruelly exposed on many occasions in this study, particularly in the more polarised socio-cultural and religious environment of the United States. As Raven Kaldera notes: ‘We blur boundaries. We dance back and forth over drawn lines as if they didn’t exist, enraging those who have staked their worldviews on the existence of these lines (Kolodny, 2000:147).’

There was indeed, on occasion, a sense of rage expressed by participants at their treatment by the Church, notably by Corinne in Research Cell 2 (UK bisexual Christians), and by Toni in Research Cell 4 (US bisexual Christians). There was also a feeling that church leaders were stymied, theologically exasperated or even in denial of the validity of bisexuality (Fritz Klein’s ‘non-existence myth’, 1993). Rather than attempt to understand or educate themselves about bisexuality, however, the default mechanism appeared to involve either burying one’s head in the sand over bisexuality, or demonising bisexual people on account of their supposed lack of moral integrity: ‘Too often... the category of bisexuality is a weapon used by straights and gays/lesbians (Klopovic in Kolodny, 2000:155).’ Activist and creator of Faithfully LGBT, Eliel Cruz, took the decision to conceal his bisexual identity in print, as it had proven such a distraction from his journalistic attempts to foster LGBT inclusion.

However, as the quote above suggests, this degradation of bisexual people takes place within the LGBT faith community as in mainstream heterosexist church environments. Too often, the B is only visible in nomenclature; there is no actual provision for bisexual people, due to either

ignorance, apathy or fear that the validity of same-sex relationships will be sullied by the acceptance of 'promiscuous' bisexual people. This was seen to be of particular relevance to the marriage equality debate in both the UK and US.

It did appear that Anderson's 'one time rule' of homosexuality (Anderson, 2008) applied in church circles as in secular life, and arguably more so, given the widespread ignorance of, and antipathy towards, same sex attraction. There was precious little concept of gradated sexual orientation or sexual fluidity, concurrently or over the lifespan. Bisexual feminist Susan George noted nearly twenty-five years ago that:

Most books of progressive sexual theory still omit bisexuality completely and the fact that many people have feelings for and relationships with people of both sexes is obscured. Once a person is known to have same-sex relationships, he or she is labelled homosexual, which becomes an exclusive identity, irrespective of whether he or she has mixed-gender relationships as well (1993:36).

It appeared to still be the case in 2016 that works of progressive theology, as well as church resources, sermons and pastoral provision, were all aimed at monosexual sexual orientations, subsuming bisexual people within the homosexual category, even if they were predominately attracted to the opposite sex.

There was also clear evidence of erasure via cultural appropriation on the part of progressive theologians, claiming potentially bisexual figures from Scripture as homosexual heroes (e.g. King David, Ruth, Jesus himself). This was revealed in a number of works of LGBT theology in the literature review.

However, the most consistent confirmation of existing findings in the field was in the area of mental health, with 89% of UK and 100% of US participants revealing a depressive condition of varying intensity. It was beyond the scope of this study, and indeed beyond my own personal skillset, to definitively link either a bisexual orientation, a Christian faith or indeed both, to poor mental health. Nevertheless, there is little point in engaging in qualitative research if the views of participants are to be routinely discredited owing to a lack of hard evidence in the form of quantitative data or otherwise.

It was clear to me from the responses of participants in all four research cells, that the intersectional Christian bisexual identity was fraught with multi-faceted complexities that made every-day life challenging, particularly within church environments. This, by any standard



test of mental health<sup>146</sup> employed by GP surgeries nationwide, would serve as proof of a depressive condition in need of resolution. Yet for all the saccharine promises of a warm welcome for everyone, there was a palpable sense among participants that churches either turned their backs on bisexuality, or adopted a 'wait and bait' technique, enticing sexual minorities into the building, then attempting to either indoctrinate them with fundamentalist rhetoric, or shoe-horn them into existing homosexual provisions.

### **How can churches be more welcoming?**

In my introduction, I queried whether it was possible for a bisexual Christian to bring their 'full selves', i.e. their integrated (or embodied) physiological and spiritual being to church with them, and have this embodied self-affirmed and celebrated. It appeared from my interviews, with participants both sides of the Atlantic, that this was rarely achieved. It was also clear that the issue was not ontological. It was not being bisexual that was the problem on the whole; it was how bisexual individuals were perceived by others and its subsequent impact on their sense of wellbeing. To return to the title of this research project, what then needs to happen for bisexual Christians to feel welcome within the denomination of their choice?

Colleen Darraugh, a Lead Pastor within the Metropolitan Community Church denomination, made an important point regarding inclusive policies over affirming policies. A number of participants within the study had called for a space for bisexual Christians to share experiences and offer mutual support. However, as Rev. Darraugh pointed out, physical space requires 'space for grace' (my phraseology) - in other words, a generosity of spirit with the capacity to encompass an ever-diverse range of sexualities and gender expressions. To affirm is simply to accept those who are already in the building; to be inclusive is to open the doors to any potential visitors, now and in the future, of whatever sexuality or gender identity.

However, it would seem that educating clergy, as well as the provision of bespoke resources, are required before inclusive practices can be implemented. At the time of interview, Alford-Harkey & Haffner's *Bisexuality: Making the Invisible Visible in Faith Communities* (2014) was the only book on the global market to deal specifically with pastoral practice around bisexual issues. Since interviews took place, Jaime Sommers has published an autobiographical work entitled *119: My Life as Bisexual Christian* (Sommers, 2016), which could potentially serve as a

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<sup>146</sup> e.g. <http://www.nhs.uk/Tools/Pages/depression.aspx>

resource in churches to aid pastors and laity alike. The title of this book refers to the 119 words used by the Church of England in the much-maligned document *Issues in Human Sexuality* (Church of England, 1991), a report that several participants pointed to as being particularly damaging and direly in need of updating to reflect a more humane and accurate understanding of bisexuality.

It is unlikely, however, that this is a top priority for the Church of England, as it tries to avoid schism within the global Anglican Commune over the issue of homosexuality. The result of the Shared Conversations within the Church of England in January 2017<sup>147</sup> saw no change to existing laws on same sex marriage, though a slight warming of attitudes towards LGBT issues suggests a modicum of hope for the future. In a climate where maintaining unity often takes precedence over human rights violations against LGBT people<sup>148</sup>, it is difficult to see how affirmation and education around bisexuality will feature on the agenda of the established church in the UK, particularly when ‘them and us’ theology still prevails. Despite the presence of several prominent LGBT Christians within these ‘Shared Conversations,’ including Tracey Byrne, CEO of the Lesbian & Gay Christian Movement, interviewed in Chapter 6, the Church of England chose to retain its conservative position on human sexuality, recommending merely that LGBT Christians were given a warmer welcome in the nations’ churches.

It was apparent that most of the mainstream denominations in the UK felt nervous around LGBT issues, opting for silence over sermonizing. A number of bisexual Christians in the UK cell commented on the glaring lack of attention paid to human sexuality in general within church services. This was particularly noticeable at evangelical Christian conferences, where twenty years ago ‘healing ministry’ for homosexuality was widely offered, even if such practices were largely ineffective and clinically (let alone ethically) dubious.

The situation was slightly different in the US. Though silence and avoidance of LGBT issues was still the tactic of choice by most churches, even evangelical mega-churches, the marriage equality campaign and series of bathroom bills<sup>149</sup> had brought issues of gender and sexuality to the forefront in recent years. Some of the hysterical reactions to same sex marriage and

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<sup>147</sup> Accessed at <https://www.churchofengland.org/media-centre/news/2017/01/general-synod-press-conference.aspx>

<sup>148</sup> See <http://www.voanews.com/a/africas-gays-say-theyre-under-siege--115100674/159757.html>

<sup>149</sup> See <http://christiannews.net/2013/07/13/christians-warn-bathroom-bill-allowing-men-in-womens-restrooms-is-sweeping-nation/>

transgender rights had highlighted what several pastors and educators referred to as sex-negativity or erotophobia, both within non-affirming traditions and in US society as a whole. These sex-negative attitudes extended into the printed word, with several participants stating that the word bisexual was often erroneously eschewed in favour of gay or lesbian, since the word itself contained the root 'sex,' adding a further layer of bisexual erasure. James Rowe of Believe Out Loud!, Michael Monroe of the Bisexual Resource Center, and Reverend Janet Edwards of the Presbyterian Church all expressed doubt at how bisexual visibility could be raised in a climate where discussion of human sexuality, even at its most generic level, was avoided at all costs.

On the other hand, as pointed out by Rev. Colleen Darraugh (Metropolitan Community Church), the increased media focus on gender and sexuality that accompanied the media frenzy over bathroom bills could be seen as an opportunity for churches to initiate conversations on gender. Such discussions of what it means to identify as male or female might organically lead to a wider debate on gender and sexual fluidity, which would ultimately aid the bisexual cause.

However, this potential pathway to increased dialogue could well be nullified by another socio-political development – marriage equality. As Neil Cazares-Thomas of the Cathedral of Hope pointed out, it will be interesting to see if same-sex marriage sees gay and lesbian married couples turn oppressor, or side with the oppressed. Will they become part of the monosexual mainstream and turn against bisexual people and other middle sexualities in the name of middle-class respectability, or will they use their enhanced social status to stand up for their BTIA peers? Or will the growing category of 'mostly heterosexual' (Savin-Williams & Vrangalova, 2013) eclipse heterosexuality over time, thus negating the likelihood of bisexual oppression in any case?

The issue of sexual autonomy was raised by Professor Lisa Diamond, with particular reference to the welfare of bi- and homosexual Mormon youth, pressurised into opposite sex marriages due to an overt emphasis on heterosexual family structures, with eternal spiritual consequences for those who do not fit into the procreative marital construct. This was also true of other conservative traditions, such as the Seventh-day Adventists, though most non-affirming churches, including the Church of England in the UK, also took the view that it was spiritually expedient to choose an opposite sex partner over a same-sex one. Such views

ostensibly place heterosexual relationships at the top of the relationship hierarchy, despite progress made on marriage equality.

The biggest variation between the UK and the US was found in attitudes to polyamory or non-monogamy. In the UK, none of the polyamorous participants interviewed ( $n=4$ ) had felt able to either remain in the church, or remain polyamorous. Two had renounced Christianity altogether, while the other two had given up polyamory, though both deemed it too difficult to manage at an interpersonal level, rather than citing prejudice within the church as the reason for embracing monogamy. Among US participants, however, three out of four polyamorous participants were currently worshipping in churches, with one a member of the United Church of Christ, one a member of the Unitarian Universalist Church and another part of a Quaker meeting. The fourth member had left the church and no longer claimed a Christian identity.

It was clear that those churches which allowed for sexual autonomy were able to retain polyamorous bisexual Christians. It was further apparent that polyamory was seen to be ethically acceptable where honesty, mutuality and consent from all parties, including church authorities, were present. This was in line with the views expressed by both liberal theologian, Carter Heyward, mentioned earlier in this study, and psychotherapist and author, Beth Firestein, interviewed in Chapters 10 and 11.

Marie Alford-Harkey, of the Religious Institute, felt that more transparency in general was required over sexual practices, to shift the whole debate onto more realistic terrain, thereby opening up the conversation on human sexuality. For Alford-Harkey, author and speaker on bisexual issues, there was a clear behavioural vacuum between sexual practice and church teaching. Open and honest debate ‘from a place of humility,’ as one participant put it, would surely help eradicate some of the desperately sad family breakdowns portrayed by young American students interviewed for this study.

Given the levels of pastoral and parental abuse aimed at vulnerable adults, young or otherwise, it is perhaps unsurprising that depressive illness statistics were so high – 89% of 28 UK bisexual Christians and 100% of 26 US bisexual Christians. However, it should be acknowledged that this sample, though large, could nevertheless be inherently biased, with those participants consenting to interview seeking for some kind of resolution or simply to talk. A number of participants, such as Freda in Tennessee or Elizabeth in Connecticut actually broke down in

tears at points in the interview, expressing relief that they were finally able to talk about their struggles as a bisexual Christian. It could thus be that ‘coping bisexuals,’ who may well have impacted on depressive illness statistics, felt no need to volunteer their time.

As Dr. Meg-John Barker of the Open University notes, ‘human experience is complexly biopsychosocial’ (Barker 2015: 372), with an ongoing interplay between genetics, social experience and psychology, with biological and socio-cultural factors determining our psychological responses to the world as we experience it. This makes it very difficult to extract any one element as being determinant in mental health outcomes.

Factors within the LGBT community as well as outside of it also had an impact on mental health. Horizontal oppression was proposed by a number of participants as a key factor in bisexual erasure and stigmatisation, particularly by those working at the interface of prejudice, such as Kate Estrop, Julia Kenfield and Michael Monroe of the Bisexual Resource Center in Boston and bisexual activist, Eliel Cruz. Increased solidarity within the LGBT community, faith-based or otherwise, was seen as a key factor in promoting a positive bisexual identity.

Identity is at the heart of this study, and both bisexual and Christian identities proved contentious in their own way. Participants in both countries struggled with the conflation of bisexuality and other middle sexualities, such as pansexuality. There was a sense in which the bisexual identity, if not bisexual behaviour, was under challenge from an ever-emerging range of individual sexualities, yet also from ‘catch-all’ terms such as queer or gender fluid.

From a faith perspective, there appeared to be some discomfort with the word Christian. Several participants, both in the UK and US, avoided the descriptor Christian, for fear of being deemed bigoted and homophobic. It was also suggested that a more positive approach should be taken towards the Bible, by steering clear of defensive apologetics on the ‘clobber passages’<sup>150</sup> relating to homosexuality, and focusing instead on the queer friendly attributes of Jesus Christ, such as his outreach to the socially marginalised, his lack of pronouncements on homosexuality in the Gospels, his elevation of women, or his meaningful relationships (potentially bisexual) with both male and female individuals.

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<sup>150</sup> Genesis 19; Leviticus 18:22; Leviticus 20:13; Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 6: 9-10; 1 Timothy 1: 8-11; Jude 1:7

### **What might a positive bisexual identity look like?**

I have discussed what positive steps might be taken to make church a more welcoming environment for bisexual Christians. This brings me full circle to the question posed at the start of this study: what might a positive bisexual identity look like? How can bisexual Christians live holistically, with an embodied faith?

One thing that struck me from this research was that, despite clerical protestations to the contrary, there clearly exists a distinct contingent of people for whom sexual and/or romantic attraction may be directed towards more than one gender. For some bisexual Christians, their attraction to same-sex partners was stronger than towards opposite-sex partners; for others, the reverse. Some bisexual Christians were also attracted to non-cisgendered individuals. Others found the objects of their attraction fluctuated over the lifetime. But every bisexual Christian interviewed expressed a clear sense of bisexual orientation, even if they sometimes chose to use alternative terminology, such as pansexual or queer.

What was distinctly lacking, however, was a unified bisexual voice to speak out for tolerance and acceptance of bisexual Christians, leaving it to third party activist groups such as Believe Out Loud!, or secular outfits, such as the Bisexual Resource Center, to advocate for bisexual rights. Some form of inter-denominational bisexual organisation was required to match the growing clamour for transgender awareness and acceptance. There were certainly enough bisexual participants, both clergy and laity, to realise this concept, especially given the growing use of the internet as a space for faith communities to meet, grow and forge mutually beneficial partnerships with other stakeholders in the field of LGBT faith activism.

It further emerged that bisexual Christians tended to flourish in those traditions where free will was understood as inclusive of sexual autonomy, as there was no need to conceal their dual plus attraction. These individuals, in the words of Lisa Diamond, were able to speak their 'sexual truth.'

With regard to alternative relationship configurations, polyamorous bisexual individuals who attended poly-affirming denominations such as MCC, UU and, in certain locations, the Quakers, tended to remain in worship environments, while those who came from more conservative traditions tended to leave the church altogether, sometimes even ceasing to identify as

Christian. (My justification for considering the polyamory question, despite its often nebulous connections with bisexuality, is outlined earlier in this discussion).

In terms of an embodied faith, those participants who had inherited erotophobic and heterosexist readings of Scripture, usually from conservative evangelical churches and the Catholic Church, experienced a clear head/body or dualist conflict, rendering them largely unable to express their sexual desires without feelings of guilt and internalised biphobia.

For a positive self-image, it was clear that the bisexual Christian needed to worship within a sex-positive environment that championed an embodied faith and did not operate along dualist lines. While there is a genuine risk that marriage equality might consolidate existing monosexist outlooks in the UK and US, there was some hope that the current furor in the US over transgender rights might just open the door to a more nuanced discussion of gender and sexuality. This could potentially pave the way for increased awareness and acceptance of bisexual people, as the public is challenged on notions of what constitutes typically male and female behaviours.

## **Conclusions**

To conclude this study, there was clear evidence that bisexual Christians suffered acute minority stress owing to a multi-intersectional identity. This was particularly evident in some of the personal accounts provided by a number of young American students, but also from several Anglicans in the UK survey sample. It looked unlikely that bisexual Christians would achieve any degree of heightened visibility within the more fundamentalist branches of the Church, where bisexuality was largely overshadowed by gay, lesbian and, increasingly, transgender issues, or actively erased owing to its negative associations with polyamory and promiscuity.

However, there is every chance that bisexual Christians may thrive in worship communities that are openly inclusive of existing and emerging sexual identities, where progressive readings of Scripture (or other sacred or seminal texts) are encouraged, and responsible, consensual sexual expression allowed. Given that bisexuals represent the largest sector within the LGBT community at 40% (Pew, 2013), it would seem plausible that some form of online worship community for bisexual Christians could be set up with the intention of creating a unified space

for bisexual people of faith to network and, in due course, mobilise into a visible physical presence.

There were clearly limits to this study. While it could be demonstrated that bisexual Christians were adversely affected by the twin stressors of stigmatisation and erasure, it was not possible to definitively link bisexuality to adverse mental health. The causations of poor mental health are manifold; indeed, in this study, a range of factors led to participants disclosing depressive conditions which were by no means exclusive to sexual minorities. It should also be acknowledged that with qualitative research of this kind, those individuals who have something to say often put themselves forward more readily than those who have reached a place of resolution.

Limitations aside, it was clear from my interviews that clergy were mightily challenged by bisexuality and that bisexual Christians were, by and large, extremely frustrated and in some cases furious with the present situation confronting them in church communities. While progress was tangible in terms of gay and lesbian affirmation via the marriage equality route, this appeared to be at the expense of the visibility of dual plus attracted individuals. The increased awareness of transgender rights, whilst simultaneously giving expression to some vicious prejudice, nevertheless raised the profile of the trans community, too, once more leaving bisexuality as the invisible, invalid, silent partner within the LGBT(IA) acronym.

I witnessed stunning levels of ignorance about bisexuality from pastors, as well as disturbing accounts of institutionalised biphobia from participants. While heterosexism appears to be marginally on the decline, with increased affirmation in general of LGBT individuals, this has not been to the benefit of bisexual people. Those people I interviewed, several of whom were in tears, often found it simply easier and less mentally exhausting to remain in the closet than to publicly disclose their orientation. This was unfortunate, as it became clear as interviews progressed, that a unified bisexual voice, perhaps achieved online in the first instance, was key to raising the profile and affirmation of bisexual people of faith.

### **Unique Value of this Study**

I believe there to be a number of unique aspects to this study which I should like to highlight in conclusion to this doctoral thesis.



This study is unique in its high volume of participants, numbering 83 in total. I believe there are no standalone qualitative research studies into bisexuality and Christianity at present which feature such a large number of interviewees, the vast majority of which (84%) were interviewed in person (face to face, by telephone or via live video link). It is also unique in its cross-cultural approach, including participants from both the UK and US in largely equal numbers. Participants were also recruited from ethnic minorities and from across the lifespan. There was a good geographical spread in both the UK and US research cells, thus avoiding claims of metropolitan bias.

Whilst this study confirmed that minority stress (Meyer 2003, 2013) exists among bisexual Christians and that elevated rates of depressive illness are seen among this cohort, in line with recent studies (e.g. Colledge et al, 2015; OU 2012), it was not clear-cut from the data that the dual typical stressors of bisexual erasure and biphobia alone were to account for depression and suicidality. In fact, it would be disingenuous to make such a claim. I believe my close interrogation of factors behind the depressive illnesses reported by participants lends this particular study authenticity and integrity.

That said, I believe that the following issues must be addressed in response to this research. Firstly, the western Christian Church needs to review its binary understandings of human sexuality to enable those with middle sexualities to access worship communities. Secondly, bisexual Christians themselves should mobilise at national level and beyond to make their own voices heard, following the example of the transgender community in the United States. Thirdly, the mental health implications of ignoring bisexuality, both within secular and religious communities, must be addressed by religious and health practitioners, to avoid some of the personal tragedies highlighted by this study.



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# **Appendices**

## Appendix 1

### Research Project Information Sheet

#### Bisexual Christians & Mental Health: Why the Church needs to be more welcoming

Despite significant shifts in both social attitudes and theological positions towards homosexual people, bisexuality or dual attraction remains largely taboo within the Church, particularly in the UK. This research study aims to investigate how bisexual people and those who pastor them resolve the complexity of living with this particular intersectional identity (= bisexual & Christian).

Through interviewing bisexual people and those who pastor/support them, it is intended to further understandings of bisexuality and how dual attracted Christians might live holistically within a Christian ethical framework. Models for affirming and including bisexual people and bisexuality within the Christian faith will be assessed based on the lived experiences shared by participants in this study. Participants are required from both the UK and US for the purposes of this research. In order to be eligible for this study, you must either personally identify as bisexual and Christian, or pastor/support bisexual people of Christian faith.

Participation will take the form of recorded interviews of approximately thirty minute's duration, face to face where possible, or by other means (Skype, cell-phone, email questionnaire). The anonymity of all participants is guaranteed in line with University of Winchester ethical guidelines, as is the right to withdraw from the study at any point. Your details will be saved on file with full encryption software in the format *fake forename, county (or State)* and you will appear in the eventual study under the same alias.

This project has funding from the American Institute of Bisexuality.

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## Appendix 2

### Research Study

Bisexual Christians & Mental Health:  
Why the Church needs to be more welcoming

### Consent Form

I have read and understood the information about the project. I understand that my participation in this project is completely voluntary, and that I may withdraw at any time during the project, without penalty.

I understand the arrangements that have been made to ensure my anonymity and privacy. I am aware that I have the right to see what has been written about me.

The researcher has made clear to me any risks which may be involved in my participation in the project.

The arrangements for secure storage of data, and for its eventual disposal, have been explained to me.

On this basis, I consent to take part in the project.

Signed. .... Date.....

## Appendix 3

### Research Study

Bisexual Christians & Mental Health: Why the Church needs to be more welcoming

### Participant Questionnaire

(Please type in **red** or **bold** below each question. Please answer as fully as possible. All information is strictly anonymous in line with University ethical guidelines.)

1. How old are you?
2. What ethnic group do you belong to? (Caucasian/African-American/Afro-Caribbean/Asian/Latino etc.)
3. Do you identify as Christian?
4. Do you identify as bisexual?
5. In which State (USA) or county (UK) do you live?
6. Do you currently attend church?
7. If so, which denomination?
8. If not, which denomination did you attend growing up / prior to leaving church?
9. Are your parents Christians?
10. Are you in a relationship?
11. If so, what gender(s) and for how long have you been together? (Please add children if you have any)
12. Have you ever heard anyone speak about bisexuality at church, in a sermon or workshop?
13. Have you told anyone in a church setting that you are bisexual?
14. How did they react, if so?
15. Are you out to your family?
16. How did they react, if so?
17. What do you find difficult about being bisexual and Christian?
18. Do you know other bisexual Christians?
19. Do you attend any support groups?
20. Do you approve of polyamory (more than one romantic/sexual partner)?
21. Do you have health issues (depression/anxiety etc.) related to your sexuality and/or faith?
22. Have you had suicidal thoughts or attempted suicide?
23. If so, was this related to your faith and/or sexuality?
24. Have you ever taken part in gay aversion therapy/healing ministry for your sexuality?
25. If so, how did this make you feel?
26. I am concerned with improving mental health for bisexual people of faith through raising awareness of issues faced by bi Christians. What would make church better for you? (What would you like to see improved in churches?)

## Appendix 4

### Survey Monkey Questionnaire, February 2016 – April 2017

#### Bisexual Christian Mental Health

The following questions were asked on this short, free online survey. The responses are stated below, divided into UK and US respondents.

1. What is your gender?
2. How old are you?
3. What county or State do you live in?
4. Do you identify as bisexual and Christian/ex-Christian? (If not, do not proceed)
5. What denomination are you/were you? (e.g. Baptist, Catholic, LDS, Presbyterian etc.)
6. Have you ever attended conversion therapy/ex-gay ministry?
7. If so, how did that feel (use up to five adjectives, e.g. ashamed, angry etc.)?
8. Do you (did you) feel affirmed or non-affirmed as a bisexual person in church?
9. Do you suffer from/take medication for depression/anxiety?
10. Have you ever had suicidal thoughts and if so, was this related to your sexuality?

#### UK Responses

##### #1

1	Female
2	40
3	Greater London
4	Yes
5	Baptist/Born Again
6	No
7	No
8	Very much non affirmed
9	Not currently, but did late teens/early twenties (left church aged 15)
10	Yes, no.

##### #2

1	Agender Femme
2	22
3	Merseyside
4	Yes
5	Catholic
6	No
7	No
8	Not at all
9	Take meds
10	Yes

**#3**

1	Non binary
2	37
3	UK
4	Yes
5	Anglican
6	No
7	No
8	Neither. I feel like the church treats me with benign neglect
9	I suffer from depression; I am currently un-medicated
10	Yes. No

**#4**

1	Non binary
2	19
3	London
4	Yes
5	Catholic
6	No
7	No
8	Non affirmed
9	Yes (no medication)
10	Yes, unsure

## US Responses

**#1**

1	Female
2	26
3	Wyoming
4	Yes
5	Non-denominational
6	No
7	No
8	Definitely not



9	Yes
10	Yes

## #2

1	Ciswoman, femme
2	31
3	Dallas
4	Bi and ex-Christian
5	Non denominational
6	Nope
7	No
8	I had quite on Christianity long before I really came into my sexuality and accepted it, but I do recall the antiqueer sentiments from each of the various churches my family decided was in vogue.
9	Yes, but I no longer take medication for it, the depression is gone, but I still have a good case of social anxiety disorder.
10	Yes, but not in the sense that my orientation was the main reason, but it did come into play.

## #3

1	Female
2	25
3	US
4	Yes
5	Catholic (ex)
6	No
7	No
8	No
9	Yes
10	No

## #4

1	Female
2	19
3	US
4	Yes
5	Baptist
6	No
7	No
8	I haven't gone back to church
9	Yes
10	Yes I have, I don't know

## #5

1	Male
2	22
3	California
4	Bisexual ex Christian

5	Catholic
6	No
7	Didn't go
8	Non-affirmed
9	Suffer from anxiety
10	Yes briefly

#6

1	Male
2	35
3	District of Columbia
4	Yes
5	(Southern) Baptist
6	No
7	No
8	Non-affirmed
9	No
10	No

#7

1	Male
2	60
3	Illinois
4	Yes
5	Mennonite
6	No
7	N/A
8	Our church is divided and I'm not out, but the pastors have affirming tendencies.
9	No
10	Not really. If so they were temporary and not serious.

#8

1	Female
2	19
3	Texas
4	Bisexual and Christian
5	Non-denominational
6	No
7	No
8	Non-affirmed
9	Anxiety
10	Yes

## Appendix 5

desert streams email

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**From:** Desert Stream Information  
**Sent:** 23 January 2016 02:07  
**To:** 'Carol Shepherd'  
**Subject:** RE: Research Assistance Required

Hello Carol,

Thank you for your inquiry. We are not interested in being involved in this research project. Please feel free to visit our website [desertstream.org](http://desertstream.org) in order to become familiar with what our ministry stands for and what we offer. We will not be partaking in any interviews.

Sincerely,

Daniel Delgado  
Desert Stream Intern  
[816-767-1730](tel:816-767-1730) ext. 801

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**From:** Carol Shepherd [mailto:[shepherdcarol@outlook.com](mailto:shepherdcarol@outlook.com)]  
**Sent:** Friday, January 22, 2016 3:31 PM  
**To:** [info@desertstream.org](mailto:info@desertstream.org)  
**Subject:** Research Assistance Required

Hi,

I'm a Research Student at Winchester University, England. I am conducting qualitative research into how Christians who identify as bisexual are nurtured and supported by churches in the UK & US. I am looking to interview those who have pastoral responsibility for people who identify as bisexual, preferably by Skype video or audio, by otherwise by way of a questionnaire.

I am interested in a broad spectrum of pastoral practices, from liberal/LGBT affirming to evangelical/Bible-based Spiritual Wholeness therapies.

Would you be able to assist in any way? I am able to send further details if required.

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## Appendix 6

### Bisexuality in History

#### Bisexuality in the Ancient World

This appendix provides a brief etymology of human sexuality terminology - and in particular, bisexuality. This is not an exhaustive account of the origins of sexuality discourse. Rather, this is an attempt to demonstrate how the concept of bisexuality has evolved through the work of leading sexologists from the 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries as a means of casting light on subsequent theological reflections on same sex attraction. Incidences of New Testament same sex activity take place in Greek and Roman society of this time; it is therefore clear what relevance cultural context has to a hermeneutic of homo-/bisexuality.

To a certain degree, this simultaneously involves an etiology of bisexuality, assessing the various causal explanations offered up by sexologists and cultural theorists past and present for the existence of dual attraction. However, as this is a sociological and theological exploration of bisexuality, I am less concerned with causational studies of the origins of dual attraction as I am with the lived experiences of bisexual people of faith (Anderson & McCormack, 2016).

Bisexuality - in the crudest physical sense of partaking in sexual relations with both men and women - has been traced back to the ancient cultures of the Middle East and China (Norton, 2006). It was also widely practised by the Shudo of Japan.<sup>151</sup> Within these diverse cultural traditions, bisexuality took many forms, from pure sexual expression to symbolic ritual. Homosexual activity as part of historical tribal initiation ceremonies has been extensively reported in Papua New Guinea, involving fellatio between a male adult and youth with the ingestion of semen symbolising the ascent to manhood and maternal detachment.<sup>152</sup> Those involved would or will go on to have sexual relations with women.

Murray writes extensively on bisexual activity in Africa, from centuries ago to present times (Murray & Roscoe, 1998). Kurt Falk has authored a number of studies on homosexual traditions

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<sup>151</sup> See <http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Bisexuality>

<sup>152</sup> <http://www.ori.jinculture.com/community/masculinisation-dehumanization-sambia-tribe-papua-guinea/>

in Africa, including studies of homo- and bisexual activity in South West Africa (Falk, 2001) and an intimate form of same-sex activity known as *soregus* among the Naman tribe of South East Africa.<sup>153</sup> Rock paintings have been found depicting anal sex between men in Zimbabwe.<sup>154</sup> Accordingly, sexual intercourse with both men and women appears to be an entirely normal feature of androcentric traditions around the world.

But it is in Ancient Greek and Roman societies that we find illustrative evidence of bisexual activity, in accordance with the high importance these cultures placed on homoerotic expression (Cantarella, 2002; Morgan, 2008).

### **Bisexuality as the norm**

Margaret Farley describes how in Ancient Greece - and to a lesser extent, Ancient Rome - 'male human nature was generally assumed to be bisexual' (2006:28). Indeed, poly-eroticism was an accepted feature of male culture. While marriage was considered a monogamous institution in both Greece and Rome, in neither societies was sex confined to the marital bed. Incest and bigamy were forbidden, but adultery was considered morally wrong only insofar as it threatened the property of another man. Sex outside of marriage, with male or female concubines, prostitutes and other unattached individuals, was commonplace. Within such patriarchal societies, where women were little more than male trophies, male bisexuality posed no threat to existing gender power relations. While brides were expected to marry as virgins, grooms were already sexually initiated, from both heterosexual and homosexual activity.

Androcentric relationships, both platonic and sexual, were accorded higher status than male-female relations in Ancient Greece (Foucault, 1984). While homosexuality was very much a feature of Roman society, the Romans placed a great emphasis on marriage as the building block of a well-oiled society (Cantarella, 2002). For the Greeks, however, true friendship could only exist between men, as women were inferior in status, an attitude reflected in both the works of Plato and Aristotle. Pederasty, or sexual relations between a man and adolescent

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<sup>153</sup> See [http://www.glbtc.com/social-sciences/africa\\_pre,2html](http://www.glbtc.com/social-sciences/africa_pre,2html)

<sup>154</sup> See <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/mar/08/african-homosexuality-colonial-import-myth>

male, was a cultural norm, though it is doubtful whether the junior partner in this transaction derived much pleasure from it. Was this homosexuality as we know it today, an involuntary sexual desire for the same sex (Boswell, 1980; Cantarella, 2002; Katz, 2004)? Within the culturally refined Greek culture, homosexual attraction was not a matter of being drawn to men or boys *per se*, but of being attracted to beauty. As men were generally considered more beautiful than their female counterparts amongst the citizen class and love and friendship between men judged superior to conjugal affection, homosexual expression was not considered unnatural. Homosexual sex between men carried no stigma – so long as a man of social standing did not play the passive role in sexual activity (Farley, 2006).

Perhaps the lack of stigma, however, was more rooted in notions of gender superiority than sexual liberation. This society has sometimes been referred to a phallocracy - one where the phallus reigned supreme:

Perceptions of gender prevalent in ancient Greece reflect a society centred to a remarkable degree on the masculine. There was a constellation of values and customs which included patriarchy, pederasty and male homosexuality as a norm, glorification of war and male athleticism, public male nudity and public display of sculpted phalluses, along with the almost complete exclusion of women from the public sphere (Morgan, 2008).

Within this phallocracy, rationalism, military dominance and self-control reigned supreme. All that was chaotic, alien and 'other', including women, formed part of the murky underworld. This underworld was frequently alluded to in popular culture as a dark and dangerous place where chaos reigned. Within such dark and dangerous places, all manner of exotic creatures reigned in terror, presided over by Hades. One writer describes the underworld as: '... rather like being in a miserable dream, full of shadows, ill-lit and desolate, barren of hope; a joyless place where the dead slowly faded into nothingness.'<sup>155</sup>

This also serves as a fairly apt description of how church often feels to a bisexual person of faith.

### **The Origins of the Hermaphrodite**

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<sup>155</sup> See [http://www.greekmythology.com/Myths/Places/The\\_Underworld/the\\_underworld.html](http://www.greekmythology.com/Myths/Places/The_Underworld/the_underworld.html)

The notion of dual sexuality came to public consciousness through Greek classical mythology and chiefly in the figure of Hermaphroditus (Wolff, 1979). Hermaphroditus was the son of Hermes and Aphrodite. He was an exceedingly beautiful young man and Salmacis, nymph of the fountain, became so besotted with him that she begged the gods to keep him close to her forever. The gods took Salmacis literally and by conjoining Salmacis and Hermaphroditus, fused their two sexes. The dual-sexed hermaphrodite was thus born and immortalized in art and literature of the Ancient World. There are many more examples of what we would today term intersex or transsexual characters in Ancient Greek mythology, as well as clear precursory incidences of 'gender trouble' (Butler, 1990)<sup>156</sup>, e.g. the figure of Dionysos, whom Wolff describes as 'fluidic, ambiguous and shape-shifting' (1979: 1).

Clearly such creations bear no resemblance to today's bodily equivalents, but the existence of the hermaphrodite in classical cultures is relevant to the early etymology of bisexuality. Similarly, the threat posed to patriarchal hierarchies by perceived gender confusion is not confined to Ancient Greece; the unsettling impact of ambiguous identities will be a recurring theme throughout this research, from the Ancient World to modern day scenarios (Butler, 1990; Jagose, 2001).

An additional physiological point that we should perhaps bear in mind at this juncture, is the widely held belief in 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE that female reproductive organs were simply an inverted penis and testicles, 'undropped' due to a lack of essential bodily heat. This theory, propagated by Galen of Rome, continued notions of male superiority in both physiology and temperament (Laqueur, 1992).

### **The cultural background to homosexuality in the New Testament**

Nevertheless, male homosexual expressed remained subject to certain cultural boundaries within Greco-Roman society. Only certain sexual positions were allowed - those which enabled the older male to take the active role, yet without reducing the juvenile partner to total submission (as this was the role of prostitutes, women and slaves) (Farley, 2006). Female homosexuality was not accorded the same positive status within the citizen class, as women

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<sup>156</sup> I refer here to Butler's influential 1990 work, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Gender*. New York: Routledge, where 'gender trouble' is defined as acts that confuse binary discourses on sexuality and gender and are a source of unsettling ambiguity.

belonged to their husbands within this patriarchal structure. Sexual relations between women therefore counted as a violation of male property. In a society preoccupied with male sexuality, lesbian sex was also deemed unnatural (Farley, 2006). These cultural norms will be seen to be of relevance when it comes to evaluating New Testament passages on male homosexuality and lesbian relations later in this research, in the same way that Ancient Hebrew patriarchal traditions, purity laws and procreative prescriptions influence Old Testament readings of Scripture.

The much disputed translation of the Greek word *arsenokoitai* from 1 Corinthians 6:9 (homosexual, male prostitute, gay rapist, to name but a few) must also be viewed in the context of the prevailing sexual culture of that time, a fact all too often ignored by conservative theologians. Indeed, as the word homosexual is a 19<sup>th</sup> century invention, we cannot be sure at all that the Apostle Paul was referring to 'men who sleep with men,' for which the usual Greek word at that time would be *paiderasste* in any case. Up until 1967, the Catholic Encyclopaedia translated the word *arsenokoitai* as 'masturbators', though did not specify whether this was mutual masturbation between men or not.<sup>157</sup>

### **From poly-eroticism to Christianity**

However, it would be a misnomer to categorise Ancient Greece and Rome as unrestricted havens of bisexual/homosexual expression. The same Greek civilisation that produced Plato also produced the Pythagorean and the Stoics (Farley, 2006), with their emphasis on restraint and rationalism. Even Plato came to believe that the release of Eros more often than not did not further civilisation, but was open to excess and a focus on the lower bodily pleasures. The Stoic insistence on channeling all human emotions into a rational purpose saw sexual expression permissible only within the confines of procreation. Naturally, this limited acceptable sexual activity to the marital bed and therefore to heterosexual sexual expression (Cantarella, 2002). This restrictive economy of sex continued into Christianity, where it would become further squeezed through Augustinian notions of original sin and the fall of mankind.

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<sup>157</sup> See <http://www.religioustolerance.org/homarsen.htm>



Carter Heyward (1989) cites the Council of Elvira in Spain in 309 CE as the advent of antisexual sentiment in the Western Church, where men were explicitly challenged to rise above their sexual bodies, creating dualism between body and soul, or the sexual and spiritual. Heyward draws parallels between the Constantine era and 20<sup>th</sup> century Christian fundamentalism:

The Elvira Synod illustrates that a historical perspective on sexuality in western societies involves understanding the antisexual and antifemale (as well as anti-Semitic) character of Christian teachings as a means of maintaining control in what was experienced as a chaotic social milieu, much like our own historical period (1989: 44).

The result of this antisexual position was - and arguably still is - a passionless Church where spirituality is used as a weapon against sexuality and erotophobia reigns supreme, to the detriment of human freedom and flourishing (Heyward, 1984).

The roots of Augustinian asceticism can therefore be traced back to the sexual restrictions placed on married men in the Constantine era (women, of course, were already exclusively confined to sex within marriage). It is thus possible to see how homosexual and bisexual expression began to be erased from the domain of acceptable sexual behaviour in Western Europe.

### **The Origin of Sexual Species**

While dual sexuality, both physiological and psychological, has been a facet of society from the Ancient World to modern times, it was not until the Napoleonic/Victorian era that terminology for human sexuality was created in Western Europe. In 1804, The English poet Coleridge used the term *bi-sexual* to describe hermaphrodites (Bristow, 1997), though this did not pertain to orientation. Charles Darwin also used the phrase bisexual in *Fauna & Flora* in 1868, but with reference to vegetation and not human sexuality (Wolff, 1979). The concept of sexuality first appeared in the Oxford English dictionary in 1836, since another English poet, Cowper, had used the word to describe the sex life of plants (Bristow, 1997).

### **Homosexuality enters academia**

Whilst German Heinrich Kaan was pre-eminent in publishing accounts of perceived sexual perversion in *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1846), it was German physician and leading forensic

expert, Dr Johan Ludwig Casper, who was credited with being the first to write academically about homosexuality. He called it pederasty, from the Greek *paiderastes* - literally, lover of boys - a term that usually referred to sexual relations between a male adult and a male minor, where the adult ejaculated between the youngster's thighs rather than penetrating him anally. Casper viewed pederasty as one component of a pathology he termed 'mental hermaphroditism' (in contrast to physical hermaphroditism, which we would today term intersexuality or gynandry). Dr Casper did not distinguish between this mental hermaphroditism (today's bisexuality) and homosexuality and believed such pathologies to be congenital (Wolff, 1979).

Casper's congenital theory was supported a quarter of a century later by an Austrian jurist, Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, who wrote articles and novels about same sex love under the pen-name Numa Numantius. Ulrichs believed that male homosexuals were female souls in male bodies and championed equal status for 'mental hermaphrodites' such as himself. Accordingly, Ulrichs was possibly the earliest advocate for marriage equality for same sex couples. His opposition to the rigid Christian morality of his time set Ulrichs apart from his contemporaries (Wolff, 1979).

Of the early sexologists, Ulrichs was perhaps the most typical of his era in terms of the obsessive classification of sexual variations. Bristow (1997) provides a full list of Ulrichs' nuanced human sexualities, from 'Urnings' (homosexuals) to 'Dionings' (heterosexuals), with today's bisexuals termed 'Uranodionings/Uranodioningins' (male/female bisexuals).

The actual word 'homosexuality', however, was invented in 1869 by a Hungarian physician, Károly Mária Kertbeny, known more widely by his germanised pseudonym, Dr Karl Maria Benkert. Benkert produced a political pamphlet campaigning against the inclusion of Prussian sodomy statutes (the notorious Paragraph 175) within the constitution of the unified German state. He believed homosexuality to be a fixed congenital condition that should not be punishable by law (Bristow, 1997).

However, the lack of clarity surrounding homosexual behaviour in that era was reflected in the wide range of terms used to describe same sex attraction. Inversion, sodomy, pederasty, antipathic sexual reactions, contrary sexual feelings and uranism/uranianism<sup>158</sup> were all

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<sup>158</sup> 'The term Uranian derives from Plato's Symposium, in which Pausanias distinguishes between Heavenly Aphrodite (Aphrodite Urania) and Common Aphrodite (Aphrodite Pandemia). According to Pausanias, men who are inspired by Heavenly Love 'are attracted towards the male sex, and value it as

interchangeably employed, whilst mental/psychical hermaphroditism was used for what we would today call bisexuality. It was not until the mid-twentieth century that this gamut of terminology for same-sex love was to disappear from the lexicon in favour of homosexuality. And it was not until Krafft-Ebing, whose influence will be seen later in this chapter, that bisexuality became understood as a separate entity from homosexuality in human sexual behaviour, rather than being subsumed within sexual inversion pathologies.

### **Female homosexuality enters academia**

1870 saw the first academic mention of female inversion alongside male homosexuality, with the publication of an article entitled *Die Konträre Sexualempfindung* (Contrary Sexual Feelings) by Dr Carl Friedrich Otto Westphal. Westphal also viewed female homosexuality as congenital and indirectly hinted at the existence of female bisexuality. Westphal was notable for alluding to inversion as ontological rather than behavioural, dispensing with sodomy as a recreational practice and focusing on the internal physiological mechanisms that powered such desires (Bristow 1997).

The German physician, Magnus Hirschfeld, whose sexology studies were famously burnt by the Nazis, also acknowledged female homosexuality, describing male and female homosexuals as 'sexual intermediaries' on a continuum from male to female (Weeks 1986; Wolff 1979). Hirschfeld was the leading advocate of homosexual rights of his era.

### **Bisexuality as a separate phenomenon**

In 1884, little-known French sexologist E Gley, in an article entitled *Les Aberations de l'Instinct Sexuel* writing in the *Revue Philosophique*, cited bisexuality as the root cause of homosexuality. Gley was later heralded as a pioneering figure by Sigmund Freud in his *Three Essays on the*

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*being naturally the stronger and more intelligent . . . their intention is to form a lasting attachment and partnership for life.' The term Urning (derived from Urania) was popularized throughout Europe by the Austrian legal official Karl Heinrich Ulrichs (1825-1895), who argued that the love of some men for other men was inborn and therefore natural and unblameworthy. Ulrichs' term was adapted in England as Uranian and was used at first to embrace all homosexuals. More narrowly, it was used to designate an elitist movement in English poetry dating from the close of the Victorian era to about 1930 that celebrated love for adolescent boys. The Uranian writers, chiefly minor poets, were inspired by feelings akin to the pederasteia (pederasty) of the ancient Greeks, but were far more circumspect and clandestine because of the prevailing cultural attitudes of their time.'*

[Source: LGBTQ.com, accessed at [http://www.glbtc.com/literature/german\\_austrian\\_lit2\\_19c\\_20c.html](http://www.glbtc.com/literature/german_austrian_lit2_19c_20c.html), click on glossary link at <http://www.glbtc.com/glossary.php?word=Uranian&part=>

*Theory of Sexuality* (1905), influencing Freud's theory on childhood bisexuality (Storr 2013). Another article published in the *Revue Philosophique* (1887), this time by French psychologist Alfred Binet, also gave coverage to bisexuality. Binet believed that the human eye was capable of falling for either sex during a state of heightened sexual awareness – and therefore the choice of love object was out of the control of the individual (Wolff 1979).

However, it was an Austrian - Richard Freiherr von Krafft-Ebing – who created the 'sexological bible' (Wolff 1979:10), with the publication of the seminal *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886). Krafft-Ebing paved the way for his compatriot, Freud, and subsequent studies of human sexuality.

Despite its allegiance to the deviancy and pathology rhetorics of its predecessors, *Psychopathia Sexualis* (von Krafft-Ebing, 2013) was to prove a highly influential publication world-wide.

Whilst Krafft-Ebing carried the prejudicial baggage of traditional Christian morality of the time (a rigid morality which still exists today among some conservative churches and their colonial outposts), he held a sympathetic view towards the individuals at the centre of his case studies and, like Ulrichs before him, spoke out against Paragraph 175. Krafft-Ebing was the first to distinguish clearly between bisexuality (which he termed 'psychosexual hermaphroditism') and homosexuality ('sexual inversion'), though he did believe that homosexual feelings predominated in male and female bisexuals (Wolff 1979). His case studies also referred to instances of what we would today call transsexualism and gender dysphoria. He believed such behaviour, as well as certain physical features of gender dysphoric people, to be caused by the original bisexuality of all human beings (Angelides 2001; Freud 1991) – a theme, of course, that later found resonance in the works of Freud and to a certain extent, Carl Jung (Garber 1995). Later on in his career, Krafft-Ebing distanced himself from the moral absolutes of his earlier years, viewing homosexuality and bisexuality as natural variations - and therefore not necessarily punishable by law.

John Boswell (1980) claimed that the word *homosexual* first appeared in the English lexicon around 1891, though others give a date of around 1897, when Victorian sexologist Havelock Ellis used the term in *Studies in the Psychology of Sex: Sexual Inversion*. Ellis himself had coined the phrase from a contemporary, Bohemian sexologist Richard Burton. However, Ellis himself disliked the neologism *homosexual* with its linguistic synthesis of Greek (*homo*) and Latin (*sexus*), preferring the term *sexual inversion* (Garber 1995). The sexual invert was a common feature of gay literature of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, perhaps most notably the figure of Stephen

Gordon in Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness*<sup>159</sup>. Married to a bisexual woman himself, Ellis was the first to discuss female bisexuality in England.

The emerging discipline of *Sexualwissenschaft* (sexual science/knowledge) was making inroads into the public consciousness in both Germany and England. Iwan Bloch's *Sexual Life of Our Time* (1907) owed a great debt to Krafft-Ebing and the notion of sexuality as the most powerful force driving individuals and society was given credence here, too. Foucault, however, would later dispute such assertions – it is power relations driven by discourse on human sexuality that empower or marginalise individuals, not any power inherent within sexuality, which is in itself a construct of human discourse.

Like Krafft-Ebing before him, Ellis spoke of bisexuality in terms of sexual dimorphism, with the existence of male and female characteristics in one single body – not sexual organs, but a male and female psyche. By Volume 2 of *Studies in the Psychology of Sex: Sexual Inversion* in 1915, Ellis had expanded the definition to include sexual desire for both genders. It can be inferred from Ellis's writing that bisexuality was beginning to catch on semantically, if not conceptually, by the early 1900s. The term *heterosexuality* also came into existence in the first few years of the nineteenth century, and initially referred to an abnormal appetite for the opposite sex, rather than sexual preference itself.<sup>160</sup>

### **Bisexuality as psychosexual, not physiological**

The early 1900s marked the etymological shift from bisexuality as *being* both sexes, to *desiring* both sexes. The focus moved away from bodily attributes to psychosexual behaviour.<sup>161</sup>

It was Austrian neurologist, Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis, who brought bisexuality to the general public consciousness – though there was a central irony in this, since Freud had rather ignominiously stolen the germ of his bisexuality theory from erstwhile friend and collaborator, Wilhelm Fliess (Angelides 2001; Freud 1991).

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<sup>159</sup> Hall, Radclyffe (1928). *The Well of Loneliness*. London: Virago

<sup>160</sup> *Dorland's Medical Dictionary*, see Garber (1995), p.41

<sup>161</sup> Cowen & Elden (2002) p.79: 'We can therefore see that at some point a shift in meaning occurred – bisexuals were originally considered to be as *physiologically* plural, in the sense of having more than one sex; at some point in time they came to be considered as desiring more than one sex, as *psychologically* plural.'

Freud spoke of the innate bisexuality of all human beings at birth – the unisex infant who still carries prenatal traces of male and female sexuality and as such, is erotically attracted to both sexes (Freud 1991). Through suppression of the same-sex impulse via societal norms and expectations, the child gradually develops into heterosexual maturity. Neurosis, dysfunction and disorder resulted, when the repressed impulse came to the fore. (The elevation of *heterosexuality* is another area I will be covering as I consider the impact of Christian morality and the Church on minority sexualities both within the church and within society as a whole.)

Homosexual attraction was therefore seen as a neurosis to be treated. Such discussions of an inborn bisexuality that must be streamlined into heterosexual behaviour, clearly presents monosexual heterosexuality as the norm and superior sexual model. In terms of locating bisexuality within the Oedipus Complex, Freud believed bisexuality to be more prevalent amongst women, due to their need to switch gender allegiance from mother to a male love interest, whereas boys need only replace maternal love with sexual love for a woman.

Like Havelock Ellis before him, Freud preferred the term ‘inversion’ for all non-heterosexual behaviour, distinguishing between *absolute inverts* (exclusively homosexual), *contingent inverts* (those who ‘resort to’ homosexual activity in the absence of opposite sex availability) and *amphigenic inverts*. Amphigenic inverts, whom Freud also refers to as *psychosexual hermaphrodites*, are not exclusive in their choice of partner.

Bisexuality and hermaphroditism are used interchangeably by Freud, though he does differentiate between physical, psychical and psychosexual hermaphrodites, with the latter two fairly indistinguishable in Freud’s rather muddled body of work on the subject (Cowan & Elden 2002). However, Freud was important in terms of disassociating sexuality and sexual attraction from the reproductive urge (Bristow, 1997).

The original bisexuality of the human being was Fliess’s brainchild, a fact, it is alleged, Freud conveniently ignored, which precipitated the breakdown in their intense friendship. Fliess also came up with the *bi-bi* theory of bisexuality and bilaterality – in short, that bisexual people are often ambidextrous or left-handed. Since ear, nose and throat doctor Fliess found fame for his theory that the nose was the seat of human sexual passion, it is perhaps necessary to adopt a degree of circumspection around this assertion (Garber 1995).

The final nail in the coffin of Freud and Fliess's friendship was the 1904 publication of Otto Weininger's *Sex and Character*, in which Weininger explains bisexuality in terms of the co-existence of male and female components in all living organisms (Garber 1995). Clearly influenced by Fliessian theory, Weininger went on to write that human beings exist in a permanent state of bisexuality:

The fact is that males and females are like two substances combined in different proportions, but with either element never wholly missing. We find, so to speak, never either a man or a woman, but only the male condition and the female condition (Weininger 1906).<sup>162</sup>

For Weininger, sexual attraction consists of a man or a woman naturally bonding with the opposite sex partner that offers them the missing male or female component within their own biological make-up. By this logic, a slightly effeminate man, who is eighty per cent masculine, will bond with a woman who is eighty per cent feminine. The missing twenty per cent is offered by the opposite sex partner, creating a fully composite sexual being (Garber, 1995). This, of course, has echoes of Swiss psychiatrist, Carl Gustav Jung, another erstwhile intellectual sparring partner of Freud who had the temerity to disagree with his mentor.

According to Jung, all males have a feminine side to the brain called the *anima* (A. Storr, 1983). Jung equated the anima with Eros, the essence of femininity. All females have a masculine side called the *animus*. Jung equated the animus with Logos, the creative intellect that he associated with men. The animus/anima is just one of many primordial archetypes that Jung believed made up what he termed *the collective unconscious*. The other-sexed part of us unconsciously guides us towards our perfect mate. This bisexuality of the human brain thus functioned as a kind of radar device, facilitating psychosexual maturity through the conjoining of opposite-sex partners.

Freud later distanced himself from theories surrounding primary bisexuality. Though Freud continued to use the phrase *bisexual disposition* on many occasions, it is not exactly clear what he meant by this. His definition of bisexuality as the 'mysterious heart of human sexuality'<sup>163</sup> (M. Storr, 2013) feels like a fudge and is less than satisfactory, perhaps anticipating the inability of subsequent sexologists and academic writers to come to any consensus on the matter.

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<sup>162</sup> See p.7 Weininger (1906)

<sup>163</sup> See p.21 Storr, 2013

Wilhelm Stekel displayed no such hesitation in *Bisexual Love*, published in 1920. Stekel took Freud's (borrowed) theory of innate bisexuality and injected it with a large dose of certainty. For Stekel, everyone was born bisexual. Monosexuality - in the sense of being exclusively heterosexual or homosexual was simply unnatural (Garber, 1995; M. Storr, 2013). Stekel therefore turned the sexuality hierarchy on its head and made monosexuality the new pathology. Circumstances forced individuals to suppress their heterosexual or homosexual components and this repression (manifested in monosexuality) resulted in a predisposition to neurosis or breakdown:-

All persons originally are bisexual in their predisposition. There is no exception to this rule. Normal persons show a distinct bisexual period up to the age of puberty. The heterosexual then represses his homosexuality. He also sublimates a portion of his homosexual cravings in friendship, nationalism, social endeavours, gathering, etc. If this sublimation fails him, he becomes neurotic<sup>164</sup> (M. Storr, 2013).

This neuroticism is potentially increased when the individual's 'shadow side' is attacked by the chosen method of sublimation. For example, using the example of patriotism, the would-be heterosexual in Nazi Germany, who sublimated his or her homosexuality into nationalist fervour, found their repressed sexuality under constant attack from the object of worship, the Nazi State. In a similar vein, the homosexual or bisexual Christian attempting to suppress their sexuality through 'faith', cannot serve within the Church without signing up (at least passively) to an anti-homosexual agenda. This was the quandary that saw much-in demand Christian worship leader, Vicky Beeching, turn her back on a profitable career in the Anglo-American Evangelical scene in August 2014<sup>165</sup> and indeed partially precipitated my own decision to leave Licensed Lay Ministry in the Church of England, as I felt unable to swear obedience to the diocesan bishop in all matters canonical at the point of licensing.

### **Homosexuality as pathology**

Straddling the interwar and post war period was Austro-Anglian child psychoanalyst Melanie Klein. Klein took Freud's ideas of the Oedipal Complex and childhood bisexuality, but backdated them to an earlier stage of infancy (Wolff, 1979). As a child practitioner, Klein's studies carried more weight than many of her predecessors. According to Klein, the pre-

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<sup>164</sup> See p.30 *ibid*.

<sup>165</sup> See <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/news/vicky-beeching-star-of-the-christian-rock-scene-im-gay-god-loves-me-just-the-way-i-am-9667566.html>



Oedipal stage had already been passed in the second year of life – a good few years earlier than Freud claimed - and with it, the ability to discern between the male and female parent (M. Klein, 2002).

For Klein, as early as the first year of life, a baby was experiencing violent bodily reactions to both male and female parents, viewing them as a 'monstrous hermaphroditic unit' (Klein cited in Wolff 1979:3) akin to the multi-limbed creature described by Aristophanes in Plato's *Symposium*. For the confused infant, the mother and father are at times entwined as one creature in coitus, at others perceived as separate bodies with the 'wrong' genitals. Finally, the infant rediscovers his very first love, his mother's breast, which, in line with Freud, holds the key to mental well-being and 'normal' sexual development in both boys and girls.

By implication, therefore, children who do not 'realign' themselves to their maternal parent, are subject to psychological damage later in life, perpetuating the dichotomization and pathologising of sexuality into good and bad outcomes, where homosexuality in any shape or form is bad.

In the second year of life, the child is ambisexual, where intense emotions such as love, hate and jealousy are directed towards either the male or female parent, depending on circumstance. For Klein, the fluidity of hate object demonstrates the early bisexuality of children (Wolff, 1979). However, akin to Freud, Klein offered little in the way of explanation for bisexuality in adult life beyond the standard maternal alienation theory.

### **Post-structuralism & bisexuality**

It is interesting to note that perhaps more has been achieved for the bisexual cause by those philosophers and cultural theorists who did *not* write specifically about bisexuality, than those who did. April Callis (2009) criticizes poststructuralists and queer theorists such as Foucault, Butler, Fuss and Sedgwick-Kosofsky, for not doing more to further non-binary identities in their deconstruction of gender and human sexuality. Yet Foucault's dismantling of the power dynamics that serve to empower or marginalise individuals within societies have proved highly influential for feminist and queer cultural theorists such as Carter Heyward (1984, 1989) and Judith Butler (1990). Foucault's (1984) claim that the human subject is not a stable entity, but forever at the mercy of social discourse and power plays (in which he or she is also an active

participant), paved the way for Butler and others' deconstruction of gender and other essentialist discourses (Butler, 1990; Foucault, 1984).

Foucault's refusal to separate theology from culture was also significant for emerging queer theology, as it questioned essentialist discourses on the nature of God and notions of 'one size fits all' universal truths (Carrette, 2002). He called for an end to 'imperialistic theology'<sup>166</sup> and imperialistic sexual identities, forced upon people who may not sit naturally within their confines. In this way, Foucault wrote much that was of direct relevance to bisexual people, including bisexual people of faith. The Victorian classification of sexual types was debunked for what Foucault believed it to be – discourse as a means of maintaining patriarchal power structures and maintaining social stratification (Foucault, 1984). It can therefore be argued that Foucault inspired subsequent cultural theorists to uncover the cultural interests served by the classification and pathologisation of sexual orientations and behaviours.

### **Queer theory & bisexuality**

Queer theory, which emerged in the late 1980s/early 1990s (Jagose, 1997), continued the process of destabilising sexual identity through the deconstruction of gender and assumed gender roles – what Judith Butler (Butler, 1990) termed *gender performativity*. The sexual liberation movements of the 1960s and 70s had seen a rise in essentialist discourse surrounding human sexuality, as theories of innate sexuality empowered the political goals of lesbians and gay men. If sexuality was not a choice but inborn, then it was altogether easier to fight for justice for lesbian and gay identified people. These monosexist<sup>167</sup> essentialist discourses, however, were to the detriment and exclusion of non-binary sexualities.

Queer theory challenged essentialism in all its forms, deconstructing all that was considered normative and universally true. This left Queer theory and its practitioners open to accusations of undoing political progress achieved by lesbians and gays in the preceding decades. However, in questioning the stability of gender and sexuality itself, the queer theorists did little to enhance the bisexual cause, either. Butler denied that Queer theory set out to re-

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<sup>166</sup> Carrette (2002), p.227

<sup>167</sup> Anderson (2016) describes monosexism as 'the privileging of monosexual desires in society' p.7

disenfranchise marginalised groups or negate sexual identities (Brady & Schirato, 2010; Butler, 2004) It was the regulation of identities that was an issue, not self-identity as such, as any form of regulation by default led to exclusion and oppression (Butler, 2004). Butler acknowledged that 'a liveable life does require various degrees of stability... a life for which no categories of identity exist is not a liveable life (2004: 8).'

It could be argued that Queer theory and its spiritual offshoot, Queer theology, have served to benefit the bisexual cause, particularly in their challenge to theological essentialism: '... queer is about new and creative forms of morality which engage critically with all kinds of behaviour without giving right, glib, pat answers about the way forward (Cornwall, 2011).<sup>168</sup>

Writing as a non-binary individual of faith, I have myself been on the receiving end of simplistic theological non-solutions on many an occasion. In this sense, the challenge to heteronormativity mounted by Queer theologians serves as a source of encouragement and not a source of disaffection. As Halperin points out (2009), Queer is a position towards all that purports to be normal, rather than an identity as such. But by taking a position, *queering* becomes a political tool by default. This renders the dismissal of Butler and other queer theorists as somehow detached from reality of people's lives somewhat unfair.

Yet the question remains, what does a bisexual identity look like? Garber speaks of 'the identity that is also not an identity' (1995: 70). The problem with qualifying and quantifying bisexuality and the impact of this on achieving a tangible bisexual identity are dealt with in Chapter 1: Bisexuality in Discourse.

## Conclusion

I have shown how bisexual behaviour came to particular prominence in Ancient Greek and Roman societies. I also considered the findings of the Victorian sexologists and discussed how bisexuality was initially conflated with homosexuality. I also discussed how bisexuality progressed conceptually from 'being' both sexes to 'desiring' both sexes (Cowan & Elden,

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<sup>168</sup> p.23

2002), as the hermaphrodite was replaced by the sexually immature or 'sick' dual-attracted individual. This led us to the school of psychoanalysis and Freud's concept of the innate bisexuality of all human beings (Freud, 1991), an idea developed by child psychiatrist, Melanie Klein (M. Klein, 2002). The infant bisexual should mature into heterosexuality to avoid a diagnosis of mental illness, or a course of psychosexual therapy would be recommended as a matter of urgency.

I then progressed to post-war definitions of bisexuality. We saw how the schools of poststructuralism and Queer theory exposed sexual typology as a means of retaining the patriarchal hegemony, through the creation and maintenance of binary categories by dominant heterosexual males. The deconstruction of essentialist discourses and sexual identities (Butler, 1990; Foucault, 1984; Jagose, 1997) went some way to de-pathologising non-heteronormative behaviours, yet did little to further the bisexual cause (Callis, 2009).

Much of the ground gained by the bisexual identity politics of the late 60s, early 70s was lost in the name of gender fluidity and gender performativity (Butler, 2004), with various space time continuum theories of sexuality erasing bisexual identities in the clamour to challenge hetero-essentialist discourses. A well-known example of this is lesbian feminist Adrienne Rich's writings on compulsory heterosexuality and the lesbian continuum (Abelove, 2012). Rich's grading of interactions between women in terms of intensity of 'lesbian existence' remove bisexuality from the equation altogether: 'I mean the term *lesbian continuum* to include a range – through each woman's life and throughout history – of woman-identified experience, not simply the fact that a woman has had or consciously desired genital sexual experience with another woman' (Adrienne Rich *Compulsory Heterosexuality & Lesbian Existence*, cited in Abelove 2012: 239).

Thus we see that bisexuality has historically been pathologised and/or erased across the board, from the quasi social-scientific and psychoanalytical practices of the Victorian and pre-war eras to academic discourses within the schools of poststructuralism, queer theory and radical feminism in the latter half of the twentieth century/early 2000s.

Outside of fundamentalist evangelical churches and gay-aversion therapy centres, bisexuality is no longer pathologised, though it still remains subject to erasure, as this research shows. (The continued 'disease rhetoric' surrounding same-sex attraction within certain faith communities

is discussed in Chapter 4: *Bisexuality and the Church*.) The American Psychiatric Association (APA) declassified homosexuality (including bisexuality) from its lists of mental disorders in 1973, closely followed by the American Psychological Association in 1975. The World Health Organisation (WHO) followed suit some time later in 1990.<sup>169</sup>

Yet bisexual erasure remains a reality, as I demonstrate in the remaining chapters of this thesis. The deconstruction of essentialist discourses of sexuality via post-structuralism and queer theory accounts for some degree of suppression of bisexuality at a conceptual level, but sexual identity politics and ecclesiastical power structures also contrive to retain tight control over the acceptance of bisexuality as a *bona fide* sexual identity (my concept of *bi-tangibility*, see Introduction). The continued pathologisation of same-sex attraction within certain faith communities is discussed in Chapter 4: *Bisexuality and the Church*.

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<sup>169</sup> See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homosexuality\\_and\\_psychology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homosexuality_and_psychology) and other sources such as <http://www.apa.org/practice/guidelines/glbtt.pdf>

## Appendix 7

### Ten passages on same-sex attraction in the Bible

- **Genesis 19:4-8 - The Destruction of Sodom & Gomorrah**

*But before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both young and old, all the people to the last man, surrounded the house; and they called to Lot, 'Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, so that we may know them.' Lot went out of the door to the men, shut the door after him, and said, 'I beg you, my brothers, do not act so wickedly. Look, I have two daughters who have not known a man; let me bring them out to you, and do to them as you please; only do nothing to these men, for they have come under the shelter of my roof.'*

In this passage, the men of Sodom ask Lot if they can engage in sex with his male visitors. Lot says this is disgraceful behaviour and offers his daughters instead, as to have sex with the visitors would be a breach of hospitality for which he would be held accountable.

- **Leviticus 18:22 - Purity Laws**

*You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination.*

This line from Leviticus is one of a list of purity laws that God's people must keep.

- **Leviticus 20:13 - Purity Laws**

*If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death; their blood is upon them.*

As above.

- **Ruth 1:16-17 - Ruth & Naomi**

*But Ruth said, 'Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you!'*

*Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die— there will I be buried. May the Lord do thus and so to me, and more as well, if even death parts me from you!’*

In this passage, Ruth refuses to return to her own people on the death of her husband, as was common practice, and clings to her mother-in-law, Naomi. She makes a pact to stay with Naomi forever.

- **1 Samuel 18:1 - David & Jonathan**

*When David had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was bound to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.*

This passage describes the deep mutual love felt instantly between David and King Saul’s son, Jonathan.

- **2 Samuel 1:26 - David & Jonathan**

*I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; greatly beloved were you to me; your love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women.*

David is about to go to battle and knows he is unlikely to see Jonathan again.

- **Romans 1:26-27 - Paul’s Letter to the Church in Rome**

*For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error.*

The Apostle Paul expresses his views on immoral sexual expression in his letter to the Christian church in Rome.

- **1 Corinthians 6:9-10 - Paul's Letter to the Church in Corinth**

*Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers—none of these will inherit the kingdom of God.*

The Apostle Paul tells the church in Corinth what sort of behaviour excludes people from God's kingdom.

- **1 Timothy 1:8-11 - Paul's Letter to Timothy**

*Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it legitimately. This means understanding that the law is laid down not for the innocent but for the lawless and disobedient, for the godless and sinful, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their father or mother, for murderers, fornicators, sodomites, slave traders, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to the sound teaching that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me.*

Here the Apostle Paul is explaining to the young leader, Timothy, what sort of behaviours are deemed lawless according to the Gospel.

- **Jude 1:7 - The Epistle of Jude**

*Likewise, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which, in the same manner as they, indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural lust, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire.*

This passage suggests that all peoples and cities which engage in sexual immorality will face eternal damnation, based on Old Testament events at Sodom and Gomorrah.



## Appendix 8

### Comparative Translations of ‘Clobber Passages’ from Scripture

Bible Passage	NIV Translation (Evangelical)	NRSV Translation (More Progressive)	MSG (The Message) Translation (Everyday English)
<b>Genesis 19:4-8</b> The Destruction of Sodom & Gomorrah	Before they had gone to bed, all the men from every part of the city of Sodom—both young and old—surrounded the house. 5 They called to Lot, “Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them.” 6 Lot went outside to meet them and shut the door behind him 7 and said, “No, my friends. Don’t do this wicked thing. 8 Look, I have two daughters who have never slept with a man. Let me bring them out to you, and you can do what you like with them. But don’t do anything to these men, for they have come under the protection of my roof.”	4 But before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both young and old, all the people to the last man, surrounded the house; 5 and they called to Lot, “Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, so that we may know them.” 6 Lot went out of the door to the men, shut the door after him, 7 and said, “I beg you, my brothers, do not act so wickedly. 8 Look, I have two daughters who have not known a man; let me bring them out to you, and do to them as you please; only do nothing to these men, for they have come under the shelter of my roof.”	4-5 Before they went to bed men from all over the city of Sodom, young and old, descended on the house from all sides and boxed them in. They yelled to Lot, “Where are the men who are staying with you for the night? Bring them out so we can have our sport with them!” 6-8 Lot went out, barring the door behind him, and said, “Brothers, please, don’t be vile! Look, I have two daughters, virgins; let me bring them out; you can take your pleasure with them, but don’t touch these men—they’re my guests.”
<b>Leviticus 18:22</b> Old Testament Purity Laws	22 “Do not have sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman; that is detestable.	22 You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination.	22 “Don’t have sex with a man as one does with a woman. That is abhorrent.
<b>Leviticus 20:13</b> Old Testament Purity Laws	13 “If a man has sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They are to be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads.	13 If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death; their blood is upon them.	13 “If a man has sex with a man as one does with a woman, both of them have done what is abhorrent. They must be put to death; they are responsible for their own deaths.
<b>Ruth 1:16-17</b> Ruth & Naomi	16 But Ruth replied, “Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. 17 Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me.”	16 But Ruth said, “Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. 17 Where you die, I will die—there will I be buried. May the Lord do thus and so to me, and more as well, if even death parts me from you!”	16-17 But Ruth said, “Don’t force me to leave you; don’t make me go home. Where you go, I go; and where you live, I’ll live. Your people are my people, your God is my god; where you die, I’ll die, and that’s where I’ll be buried, so help me God—not even death itself is going to come between us!”
<b>1 Samuel 18:1</b> David & Jonathan	18 After David had finished talking with Saul, Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself.	18 When David[a] had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was bound to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.	18 By the time David had finished reporting to Saul, Jonathan was deeply impressed with David—an immediate bond was forged between them. He became totally committed to David. From that point on he would be David’s number-one advocate and friend.
<b>2 Samuel 1:26</b> David & Jonathan	26 I grieve for you, Jonathan my brother; you were very dear to me. Your love for me was wonderful, more wonderful than that of women.	26 I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; greatly beloved were you to me; your love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women.	26 O my dear brother Jonathan, I’m crushed by your death. Your friendship was a miracle—wonder, love far exceeding anything I’ve known—or every hope to know.
<b>Romans 1:26-27</b> Paul’s letter to the church in Rome	26 Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. 27 In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error.	26 For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, 27 and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameful acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error.	26-27 Worse followed. Refusing to know God, they soon didn’t know how to be human either—women didn’t know how to be women, men didn’t know how to be men. Sexually confused, they abused and defiled one another, women with women, men with men—all lust, no love. And then they paid for it, oh, how they paid for it—emptied of God and love, godless and loveless wretches.
<b>1 Corinthians 6: 9-10</b> Paul’s letter to the church in Corinth	9 Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men[a] 10 nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.	9 Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, 10 thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers—none of these will inherit the kingdom of God.	9-10 Don’t you realize that this is not the way to live? Unjust people who don’t care about God will not be joining in his kingdom. Those who use and abuse each other, use and abuse sex, use and abuse the earth and everything in it, don’t qualify as citizens in God’s kingdom
<b>1 Timothy 1 :8-11</b> Paul’s letter to Timothy	8 We know that the law is good if one uses it properly. 9 We also know that the law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, 10 for the sexually immoral, for those practicing homosexuality, for slave traders and liars and perjurers—and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine 11 that conforms to the gospel concerning the glory of the blessed God, which has been entrusted to me.	8 Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it legitimately. 9 This means understanding that the law is laid down not for the innocent but for the lawless and disobedient, for the godless and sinful, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their father or mother, for murderers, 10 fornicators, sodomites, slave traders, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to the sound teaching 11 that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me.	8-11 It’s true that moral guidance and counsel need to be given, but the way you say it and to whom you say it are as important as what you say. It’s obvious, isn’t it, that the law code isn’t primarily for people who live responsibly, but for the irresponsible, who defy all authority, riding roughshod over God, life, sex, truth, whatever! They are contemptuous of this great Message I’ve been put in charge of by this great God.
<b>Jude 1:7</b> The Epistle of Jude	7 In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire.	7 Likewise, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which, in the same manner as they, indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural lust,[a] serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire.	Sodom and Gomorrah, which went to sexual rack and ruin along with the surrounding cities that acted just like them, are another example. Burning and burning and never burning up, they serve still as a stock warning.

## Appendix 9

### Bisexuality and the Church in the USA per denomination

**Appendix 9** provides a brief background to some of the major Christian denominations in the USA and their policies on human sexuality, as they impact on bisexual people<sup>170</sup>, as a means of informing chapters on bisexual pastors and educators and bisexual Christians in the USA. I have not included those denominations which do not feature in Chapters 10-12. I have, however, included several denominations which may be considered either minority (e.g. Metropolitan Community Church) or multi-faith (Unitarian, Quakers), as a number of participants were members of these traditions.

#### 9.1 Introduction

While the proportion of American adults who identify as Christian has dropped from 78.4% in 2007 to 70.6% in 2014, and the number of those who declare no religious allegiance has risen from 16.1% to 22.8%, the United States remains the most Christian nation in the world, in terms of those who profess a Christian faith (Pew, 2015). Protestants remain in the majority, with 46.5% of American Christians belonging to the three main strands of Protestantism: the evangelical, mainline and historically black churches. While mainline Protestantism (e.g. United Methodist and Evangelical Lutheran churches) has seen a decline in popularity, attendance at evangelical churches has only dipped by one percentage point in the same period (Pew 2014). The table overleaf (courtesy of Pew<sup>171</sup>) shows the breakdown of Christians per denomination in the USA, displaying affiliative shifts from 2007 to 2014.

#### 9.2 The Baptist Church

The Baptist Church was brought to the North-Eastern states of the USA by English preachers in the colonies. Today there are around 33 million Baptists in the US, the second largest religious group behind the 79 million Roman Catholics. The Baptist Church in the USA is denominationally diverse, since the church is regulated at local level. The biggest denomination

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<sup>170</sup> Whilst a great deal is written about marriage equality in comparing church traditions, this is not the focus of this research project, unless it concerns the rights of bisexual clergy and laity.

<sup>171</sup> <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/chapter-1-the-changing-religious-composition-of-the-u-s/>

is the Southern Baptists (16 million). The largest African American denomination is the National Baptist Convention (7.5 million members). The Baptists lay great store by adult baptism (Believer's baptism) and the inerrancy of Scripture, meaning it often takes a conservative line on LGBT issues. However, this is subject to some regional variation owing to the local leadership model. That said, the Baptists have a reputation for being 'hard-core'. For every Martin Luther King, there is a Jerry Falwell and a Westboro Baptist Church. During my fortnight in Texas, the leader of the hugely wealthy 1<sup>st</sup> Baptist Church Dallas, Robert Jeffress, was engaged in a very public media debate with Neil Cazaes-Thomas of the Cathedral of Hope (UCC, affirming) over same sex marriage and Scripture.<sup>172</sup> Jeffress was the pastor pictured with Donald Trump in the Oval Office in May 2017 at the signing of anti-LGBT legislation.

### **9.3 The Episcopal Church**

The Episcopal Church, descended from the Church of England, has just under two million members and is a member of the global Anglican communion. The seat of authority within the church is the General Convention, an elected congress which is held every three years, and it is here that LGBT concerns are raised (Robinson 2016). According to Partridge (Robinson 2016), Episcopalians are open to theological discussion on the 'clobber passages' on homosexuality in the Bible, as well as debates over the creation story, and its implications for both human sexuality and concepts of gender. Cultural context is also taken into consideration. However, bisexuality has not featured in theological debate among Episcopalians to any discernible degree. This, despite Partridge citing Patrick Cheng's notion of the 'radical love' of God (Cheng 2011), which serves to 'challenge and open up preconceived, binary understandings of sexuality and of gender identity' (Robinson 2016). A phrase from the baptism liturgy is often used to inform the debate on LGBT rights in the Episcopal Church: 'Will you strive for justice and peace and respect the dignity of every human being?'<sup>173</sup> Yet conversations focus on marriage equality and the rights of homosexual and transgender clergy with no recourse to bisexual people (Robinson 2015).

Whilst the Episcopal church remains largely supportive of LGBT people at an official level, the democratic approach to church policy means that some dioceses and clergy may oppose full

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<sup>172</sup> See <https://hellochristian.com/4729-robert-jeffress-confronts-gay-pastor-live-on-air>

<sup>173</sup> See <http://www.episcopalchurch.org/>

inclusion of LGBT people within church life. However, this same diversity allows for an openly gay priest, Gene Robinson, to be elected Bishop of New Hampshire in 2003 and Episcopalian LGBT campaigning groups such as IntegrityUSA<sup>174</sup> to thrive. Whilst the Episcopal Church is comparatively progressive on LGBT issues, debate on the B appears to be minimal, leading Partridge to pose the question: ‘How might Episcopalians honor much more fully the gifts of bisexual Episcopalians, whose existence has barely been acknowledged in conversations to date?’ (Robinson 2016:49)

#### Christians Decline as Share of U.S. Population; Other Faiths and the Unaffiliated Are Growing

	2007 %	2014 %	Change* %
<b>Christian</b>	<b>78.4</b>	<b>70.6</b>	<b>-7.8</b>
Protestant	51.3	46.5	-4.8
<i>Evangelical</i>	26.3	25.4	-0.9
<i>Mainline</i>	18.1	14.7	-3.4
<i>Historically black</i>	6.9	6.5	-
Catholic	23.9	20.8	-3.1
Orthodox Christian	0.6	0.5	-
Mormon	1.7	1.6	-
Jehovah's Witness	0.7	0.8	-
Other Christian	0.3	0.4	-
<b>Non-Christian faiths</b>	<b>4.7</b>	<b>5.9</b>	<b>+1.2</b>
Jewish	1.7	1.9	-
Muslim	0.4	0.9	+0.5
Buddhist	0.7	0.7	-
Hindu	0.4	0.7	+0.3
Other world religions**	<0.3	0.3	-
Other faiths**	1.2	1.5	+0.3
<b>Unaffiliated</b>	<b>16.1</b>	<b>22.8</b>	<b>+6.7</b>
Atheist	1.6	3.1	+1.5
Agnostic	2.4	4.0	+1.6
Nothing in particular	12.1	15.8	+3.7
<b>Don't know/refused</b>	<b>0.8</b>	<b>0.6</b>	<b>-0.2</b>
	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

\*The "change" column displays only statistically significant changes; blank cells indicate that the difference between 2007 and 2014 is within the margin of error.

\*\*The "other world religions" category includes Sikhs, Baha'is, Taoists, Jains and a variety of other world religions. The "other faiths" category includes Unitarians, New Age religions, Native American religions and a number of other non-Christian faiths.

Source: 2014 Religious Landscape Study, conducted June 4-Sept. 30, 2014. Figures may not add to 100% and nested figures may not add to subtotals indicated due to rounding.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Source: PEW, 2015

<sup>174</sup> See <http://www.integrityusa.org/>

#### **9.4 The Evangelical Church (sometimes called non-denominational)**

A Pew report of 2015 estimates that approximately a quarter of US Christians, or 62 million, are Protestant Evangelicals. Evangelicals believe in the infallibility of Scripture and are thus inclined towards literal translations of biblical texts with little recourse to cultural context or lived experience. Homosexuality has traditionally been viewed as sinful behaviour in accordance with Romans 1, in which Paul lists ‘degrading passions’ present among the citizens of Ancient Rome, which in a literal translation, would appear to unequivocally condemn homosexual sexual expression among men and women alike. Whilst some evangelicals are being forced to reconsider their strict moral codes as shifts in society encourage more LGBT Christians to speak out, others retrench their fundamentalist position (Robinson 2016). Though campaigns such as the Reformation Project, spearheaded by Matthew Vines, seek to change hearts and minds through contextual analyses of Scripture – a deliberate move aimed at playing fundamentalists at their own game – the debate remains polarised along monosexual lines, with little said on the subject of bisexuality. Indeed, Vines’ recent publication, *God and the Gay Christian* (2015), contains only nominal references to bisexuality, as the title of the book would suggest.

#### **9.5 The Church of Latter-day Saints (or Mormons)**

The Church of Latter-day Saints was established in the USA in 1830 by Joseph Smith, who believed himself to be called by God in a vision to be a modern prophet like Moses and Abraham. The Church now boasts a global membership of over 15 million members spread over six continents, according to the official Mormon website.<sup>175</sup> In terms of LGBT affirmation, the Church is staunchly pro-family and does not accept homosexuality – which it terms ‘same-sex attraction’ or SSA - as part of God’s vision for humankind. Despite making efforts in recent years to affirm same-sex attracted Mormons within their congregations, via official websites such as *Mormon and Gay*, the teaching on such sites reveal that the LDS position remains conservative:

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<sup>175</sup> Sourced at <https://www.mormon.org/about-us>

There is no change in the Church's position of what is morally right. But what is changing—and what needs to change—is helping Church members respond sensitively and thoughtfully when they encounter same-sex attraction in their own families, among other Church members, or elsewhere.

## **9.6 The Metropolitan Community Church (MCC)**

The Metropolitan Community Church came into existence in October 1968, when founder Troy Perry held a meeting in his home in California. A failed homosexual relationship and attempted suicide led to a renewed thirst for God and a calling to serve the LGBT community. Now a global denomination, it openly affirms LGBT Christians, including bisexual people.

## **9.7 The Presbyterian Church**

The Presbyterian Church descends from the Calvinist and Knoxian traditions of England and Scotland, which dictate that God's grace alone leads to salvation, not good works. That said, a high emphasis has always been placed on morality (Robinson 2016). There has always been a significant conflict between liberal and conservative Presbyterians, with the ordination of women and debates on human sexuality playing a key role in such divisions.

The church is broadly split into three divisions. The original Presbyterian Church is now known as PCUSA and is more liberal than its conservative offshoot the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA). PCUSA takes a multi-disciplinary approach to doctrinal policy, incorporating rigorous exploration of Scripture with historical, cultural and scientific enquiry. It also ordains women and is broadly accepting of LGBT people, whilst still keeping them at arm's length to a certain degree with the denial of full rights (Robinson 2016). The Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) which emerged in 1973, does not allow women in leadership and adopts a conservative position towards LGBT issues, including a ban on LGBT clergy. The More Light Church network, on the other hand, is openly supportive of LGBT people and has ordained LGBT clergy since the 1980s. Since 1998, More Light Presbyterians (MLP), which evolved from a merger of PLGC (Presbyterians for Lesbian and Gay Concerns) and MLCN (More Light Church Network), has been the main campaigning arm for LGBT rights within the PCUSA (Robinson 2016).

Jack Rogers, a formerly conservative senior Presbyterian elder and theologian, has had a large influence on progressive policies towards LGBT people, with the publication in 2009 of his own personal enquiry into homosexuality, *Jesus, The Bible and Homosexuality: Explode the Myths*,

*Heal the Church*, the ethos of which is self-explanatory. Rogers had a conversion type experience, acknowledging the pain caused LGBT people by 'pervasive societal prejudice' (Rogers 2009: 18) and arriving at a new affirming understanding of Scripture.

However, whilst Presbyterian scholars Ellison & Thorson-Smith believe that it is 'entirely possible to affirm theologically that heterosexuality, homosexuality, and bisexuality may each fully embody the love, commitment, and mutual affection that God intends for all persons' (Robinson 2016: 134), it is not clear from official Presbyterian policy what role bisexuals play in the life of the church, if any.

## **9.8 The Quakers**

The Quakers are officially known as the Society of Friends or the Religious Society of Friends and were formed in England in the 17<sup>th</sup> century from a Christian basis.<sup>176</sup> Quakers believe that God's light is present in all people and that every human being is unique and of equal worth. Religious truth is found in inner experience and the conscience, rather than in ritual, and God is accessed directly, rather than through the medium of priests. They also believe that human redemption and heaven is accessed in this world, not at a point in the future. The bible may or may not be studied; all sacred writings as well as secular teachings may be brought to meetings and offered up as of equal spiritual worth.

## **9.9 The Roman Catholic Church**

In common with the global Roman Catholic church, homosexual relationships are viewed as 'intrinsically disordered' at official level. Whilst a 2014 Pew factsheet (Pew, 2014) showed widespread approval among the Catholic laity for gay and lesbian rights, despite the Vatican's position on human sexuality, it remains the case that bisexuality is not discussed.

Sister Jeannine Gramick, co-founder of New Ways Ministry, an affirming Catholic LGBT organisation, and author of *Building Bridges: Gay and Lesbian Reality and the Catholic Church*, comments:

When I became involved in church ministry to gay and lesbian Catholics in 1971, I had never heard any Catholic Church leader speak about homosexuality, much less bisexual, transgender, queer, or intersex issues. Even today there is no discussion of

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<sup>176</sup> See [http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/subdivisions/quakers\\_1.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/subdivisions/quakers_1.shtml)

'BTQI' issues by the Catholic hierarchy, and only the beginnings of a dialogue in the theological community and among lay Catholics (Robinson 2016: 161).

### **9.10 Seventh-day Adventists**

Seventh-day Adventists, founded in the 1860s by American preacher William Miller, takes its name from its observance of the Sabbath, understood as Saturday. Much like the Church of Latter-day Saints, it places a great deal of emphasis on the heterosexual family unit. It still takes a largely fundamentalist view towards homosexuality, despite increasing debate within the church leadership on marriage equality and transgender rights.

In 2015, the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary published a statement entitled 'An Understanding of the Biblical View on Homosexual Practice and Pastoral Care.' This report dealt entirely with homosexuality, except for one sentence: 'in addition, various alternate sexualities, including homosexuality, bisexuality, and the variety of transgender identities have become increasingly mainstream,'<sup>177</sup> suggesting little acknowledgement, let alone support, would be offered a bisexual Seventh-day Adventist.

### **9.11 Unitarian Universalism**

Unitarian Universalism has its roots in Romania and came to the United States in 1791. It preached against Calvinist teaching on eternal damnation for non-believers, believing that a God of love would make salvation available to all. Jesus is not seen as divine in himself, but as God's divine messenger to earth to spread a message of universal salvation. It is a progressive movement which takes its truths from a wide range of religious traditions and schools of thought – not Christianity alone. Human dignity, compassion and social justice are concepts within Unitarian Universalism, and it is thus not surprising that it adopts one of the most affirming positions towards LGBT people of all church traditions in the US (Robinson 2016). It was the first church to officiate at a same-sex wedding, resulting in Massachusetts becoming the first state to legalise marriage between same sex partners.

UU has a tradition of speaking up for bisexual rights. In 1970, following the Selma to Montgomery civil rights march, the General Assembly of the Unitarian Universalist Association

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<sup>177</sup> Sourced at <http://spectrummagazine.org/article/2016/01/17/seventh-day-adventist-church-and-transgender-people>



voted to stop discrimination against homosexuals. This resolution publicly acknowledged bisexuality and biphobia (Robinson 2016). In the late 1980s and 1990s, at the height of homo-hysteria (Anderson 2011), the UU launched their Welcoming Congregation Program, aimed at combatting homo- and biphobia and at helping UU church leaders welcome and nurture LGBT people. The vast majority of UU churches have today been accredited as 'Welcoming Congregations.' Bisexual people are again not excluded from debate, as Marquis notes:

Unitarian Universalist congregations have welcome have called and ordained openly lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer ministers to their pulpits for many years... In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, congregations are opening their doors more widely to bisexual, transgender, and queer ministers. Since 2000, several congregations have selected openly bisexual, transgender, and queer ministers to serve them (Robinson 2016: 176)

UU also understands and embraces intersectionality. As Marquis states:

Today, people are claiming a host of identities that are impossible to contain in a string of letters. Identity is a very personal matter and no one can or should be forced into a category because they fit some specific characteristic. Ministry requires listening to people's stories and honoring their experiences (Robinson 2016: 182).

Intersectionality is embraced through initiatives such as the Multicultural Ministries Sharing Project:

... respondents said over and over and over again that they wanted to bring their whole selves with them to their faith community. For example, they don't want to be pushed into one group for bisexuals, another for people of color, and yet another for people with disabilities. Instead, they want to be welcomed into the congregation as a bisexual person of color with disabilities and to trust that people in the congregation understand the unique challenges they face from the world because of who they are (Robinson 2016: 182).

This has clear echoes of black lesbian feminist, Audre Lorde, who spoke of the energy that flowed from her 'different selves' (Lorde 2012). At the heart of Lorde's theology was the concept that we only live to our potential when we embrace every aspect of our identity.

Perhaps most radical is 'The Bisexuality Curriculum,'<sup>178</sup> a fun 20 page resource published in 2007, aimed at small group workshops aimed at educating congregants about bisexuality. The introduction to this notes:

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<sup>178</sup> Accessed at [http://api.ning.com/files/OPKyB0rYTqrxxWfy5u2J2J6Qthzc4kjHCEsxASOfqRrjHDHA8DPi2w-SI5HtesZ2WAWgw4f5KmxGqyoF13y8aiLPxn1ZSK\\*/TheBisexualityCurriculum.pdf](http://api.ning.com/files/OPKyB0rYTqrxxWfy5u2J2J6Qthzc4kjHCEsxASOfqRrjHDHA8DPi2w-SI5HtesZ2WAWgw4f5KmxGqyoF13y8aiLPxn1ZSK*/TheBisexualityCurriculum.pdf)

Some identities are visible and obvious. Others are more hidden. Bisexuality is one of those hidden identities, and that invisibility can cause misunderstandings, hurt and confusion – or comfort, in the ability to be in the closet. Most likely, there are members and friends of your congregation who are bisexual. Most likely, they are seen as either straight or gay/lesbian. Most likely, a big part of their identity is missing from the public eye.

It is interesting that the denomination which does not hold store by the Bible alone and includes other traditions in its body of teaching, is the most proactively affirming of bisexual people.

## **9.12 The United Church of Christ (UCC)**

The United Church of Christ is a mainstream Protestant denomination with nearly a million members across the United States. It is strongly affirming of LGBT people, women and people of colour:

Since 1957, the United Church of Christ has been the church of firsts, weaving God's message of hope and extravagant welcome with action for justice and peace. Together, we live out our faith in ways that effect change in our communities. The UCC's many 'firsts' mean that we have inherited a tradition of acting upon the demands of our faith. When we read in Galatians: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus"—a demand is made upon us. And so we were the first historically white denomination to ordain an African-American, the first to ordain a woman, the first to ordain an openly gay man, and the first Christian church to affirm the right of same-gender couples to marry.<sup>179</sup>

In terms of bi-visibility, it publishes and promotes a number of bi-specific resources, including the only book thus far that focuses on bisexuality in a Church Setting, *Bisexuality: Making the Invisible Visible in Faith Communities* (Alford-Harkey & Haffner 2014). It also sells a video entitled 'Bisexual' featuring interviews with bisexual Christians and an accompanying study resource.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> <http://www.ucc.org/about>

<sup>180</sup> Accessed at [http://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/unitedchurchofchrist/legacy\\_url/5978/A-Position-of-Faith-Bisexual-study-guide-COLOR.pdf?1418430242](http://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/unitedchurchofchrist/legacy_url/5978/A-Position-of-Faith-Bisexual-study-guide-COLOR.pdf?1418430242)



